

■ A Project of North Valley Community Foundation
and the Dixie Fire Funders Round Table



Plumas County Social Safety Net Needs Assessment

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1. Executive Summary

■ The Dixie Fire began Tuesday, July 13, 2021 and burned nearly 1 million acres of land across five counties: Plumas, Butte, Lassen, Shasta, and Tehama, before it was considered contained October 25, 2021, 103 days later. It is the second largest wildfire in California history after the August Complex Fire.

In total there were 95 structures damaged and 1,329 structures destroyed by the fire and one fatality. The fire tore through the town of Greenville and decimated most of what was in its path. The Greenville Rancheria lost their medical and dental facilities, the tribal office, the environmental office, as well as two fire trucks and other vehicles in the fire. The Dixie Fire impacted every person in Plumas County – whether directly or indirectly, including the social safety net providers.

There is an astounding level of concern and sense of commitment to the region. The ties to Plumas County often go back generations and individuals are deeply ingrained in the fabric of the community. This existed pre-fire and has grown post-fire. The long-term recovery group –

established as the Dixie Fire Collaborative (DFC) – organized quickly and is making progress in facilitating

more collaborative and less siloed efforts for recovery. The Funders Roundtable, which brings together multiple funders to fund recovery efforts and to prevent duplication of funding, is also an impressive collaborative effort for other areas stricken by disaster to model. Even as a small county, there are multiple service providers, non-profits, government agencies, churches, philanthropic organizations, and individuals that have stepped in to meet enormous needs and gaps in the social safety net in the wake of such a massive disaster.

The magnitude of the Dixie Fire would have overburdened any region's social safety net, and has been especially detrimental to the less vibrant system of care in rural Plumas County. While there is such strength in the community and the immediate response to the disaster, the safety net has been and will continue to be significantly strained by the extent of the needs and the vast geographic distances required to travel to meet those needs in Plumas County. Prior to the fire, the COVID-19 pandemic put additional pressure on many aspects of the social safety net and the Dixie Fire served to exponentially exacerbate the pressure on the social safety net.



Dixie Fire, 2021

The plume from the Dixie Fire in Plumas County, as seen from nearby Deer Creek on July 22, 2021. Photo, Adobe Stock

Purpose

The need for a social safety net assessment was identified by a roundtable of funders including: North Valley Community Foundation (NVCF), The Almanor Foundation, United Way of Northern California, Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Northern Nevada, Plumas Bank, Sobrato Philanthropies, Wells Fargo, Center for Disaster Philanthropy, The PG&E Corporation Foundation, S.H. Cowell Foundation, The Common Good Community Foundation, Catholic Charities of Northern Nevada, and Sierra Institute for Community and Environment to strategically fund intermediate and long-term recovery efforts in Plumas County. Collectively, this roundtable of funders held concerns about the fragility of the safety net in Plumas County in the wake of the devastation of the Dixie Fire. To more fully understand the impacts of the fire on the nonprofit sector, as well as the public and private sector, it was recognized that a comprehensive landscape analysis on the status and organizational health of the safety net organizations and agencies hardest hit in the wake of the Dixie Fire was needed.

Ultimately, it is the goal of the Funders Roundtable to partner with organizations to provide funding towards their recovery efforts, technical assistance, and to develop sustainable pathways moving forward, for the long-term recovery and rebuilding of the entire community. Their intent is to use this analysis to assist nonprofit organizations open to innovation, adaptive strategies, and collaborations to better serve populations most in need.

This report utilizes the following definition of the social safety net from the World Bank, “Social safety net programs protect families from the impact of economic shocks, natural disasters, and other crises.” As such, assessing the social safety net includes researching government and nonprofit services, including food, shelter, housing, healthcare, behavioral health, case management, workforce development, and financial assistance available to lower-income and vulnerable populations. The report also utilizes the following definition for “vulnerable populations” from the Glossary of Essential Health Equity Terms, “Vulnerable populations are groups and communities at a higher risk for poor health {physical, mental, social} as a result of the barriers they experience to social, economic, political and environmental resources, as well as limitations due to illness or disability.”

A note about context: understanding the rurality of Plumas County is critical for recovery and rebuilding efforts – the geography of Plumas County powerfully shapes significant aspects of life for the population as well as the availability of services. How the rurality of Plumas County impacts its people is explored in more detail in this report.

Following is an executive summary of the key themes and observations that emerged from the one-on-one interviews with stakeholders about the status of the social safety net in Plumas County before and following the Dixie Fire. Many stakeholders expressed that the Dixie Fire greatly magnified the gaps that existed in the social safety net pre-fire.

Pre-Dixie Fire: Top Issues Identified by Stakeholders

HOUSING

The housing market was tight pre-fire; there was a low vacancy rate and housing was hard to secure. More housing was needed at all income levels with the lack of sufficient affordable housing impacting the most vulnerable. For Chester, stakeholders noted that the gap in housing availability and affordability for those who live and work in the area was also compounded by the number of housing units that are second homes.



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Behavioral health services were perceived to be limited before the fire. There was a lack of awareness about behavioral health services and a lack of communication about their availability. There was also a lack of providers to meet the need pre-fire and some referenced long waiting lists to see a provider. The resistance to seeking these services by a significant segment of the population was seen to be stronger pre-fire due to beliefs around receiving government assistance and the stigma of mental health issues.



Stock photo, Pixabay

EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Many characterized the lack of available childcare as a substantial issue before the fire. There were very limited childcare availability/options pre-fire which in turn impacted parents' ability to seek and retain employment. The COVID-19 pandemic also strained the already small number of providers and caused some childcare providers to close their doors.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation availability was cited as a significant barrier to accessing services. Stakeholders noted that those most in need of services often do not have reliable transportation, might not have a car, and/or might not be able to afford the gas needed to make the drive (often to Quincy or Chester) to access services. There was (and is) a bus line, but service was limited pre-fire and to make the trek to Quincy or Chester from other parts of Plumas County by bus required significant time and was a barrier to access services. There were affordable housing complexes that provided transportation first come, first serve, but it was not sufficient for the need/demand for transportation by residents.

SCHOOLS

Plumas County schools were generally seen as providing solid education, but there were comments about the strain that the COVID-19 pandemic put on the mental health of the children and staff, learning loss, and a lack of children being able to participate in distance learning due to internet connectivity. Those involved with the school system noted they were seeing more time spent in managing behaviors than in teaching, even pre-fire.

TRIBAL MEMBERS

There seemed to be a sense of disconnect between the tribal members and many of the social safety net providers. There was expressed concern for this population by many of the stakeholders interviewed, but also a lack of knowledge about the status of services for this population. Although there were some strong working relationships between tribal organizations with a few safety net agencies/organizations, the disconnect and sense of being omitted from conversations and efforts was also echoed in the interviews with tribal organizations.

ELDERLY SERVICES

Plumas County has a significant elderly population. There was a mix of perceptions about elderly services pre-fire. Some stated it was not much of a concern and that there were sufficient services for seniors, including meal support programs. Others stated it was a high concern. It is Morrison's observation that services for the elderly were limited, but in place before the pandemic; however, elderly services were very impacted by COVID-19 which forced a significant contraction in available services for this vulnerable population.



CDC, Unsplash

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development was an expressed concern by many stakeholders pre-fire. Plumas County was not part of an Economic Development Corporation, did not have a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and did not have an Economic Development Director position for the County. Stakeholders see these constraints as largely due to a lack of political will and they were seen as significantly limiting the potential of economic development in Plumas County. Some stakeholders also noted that the county's Chambers of Commerce operated in siloes pre-fire.

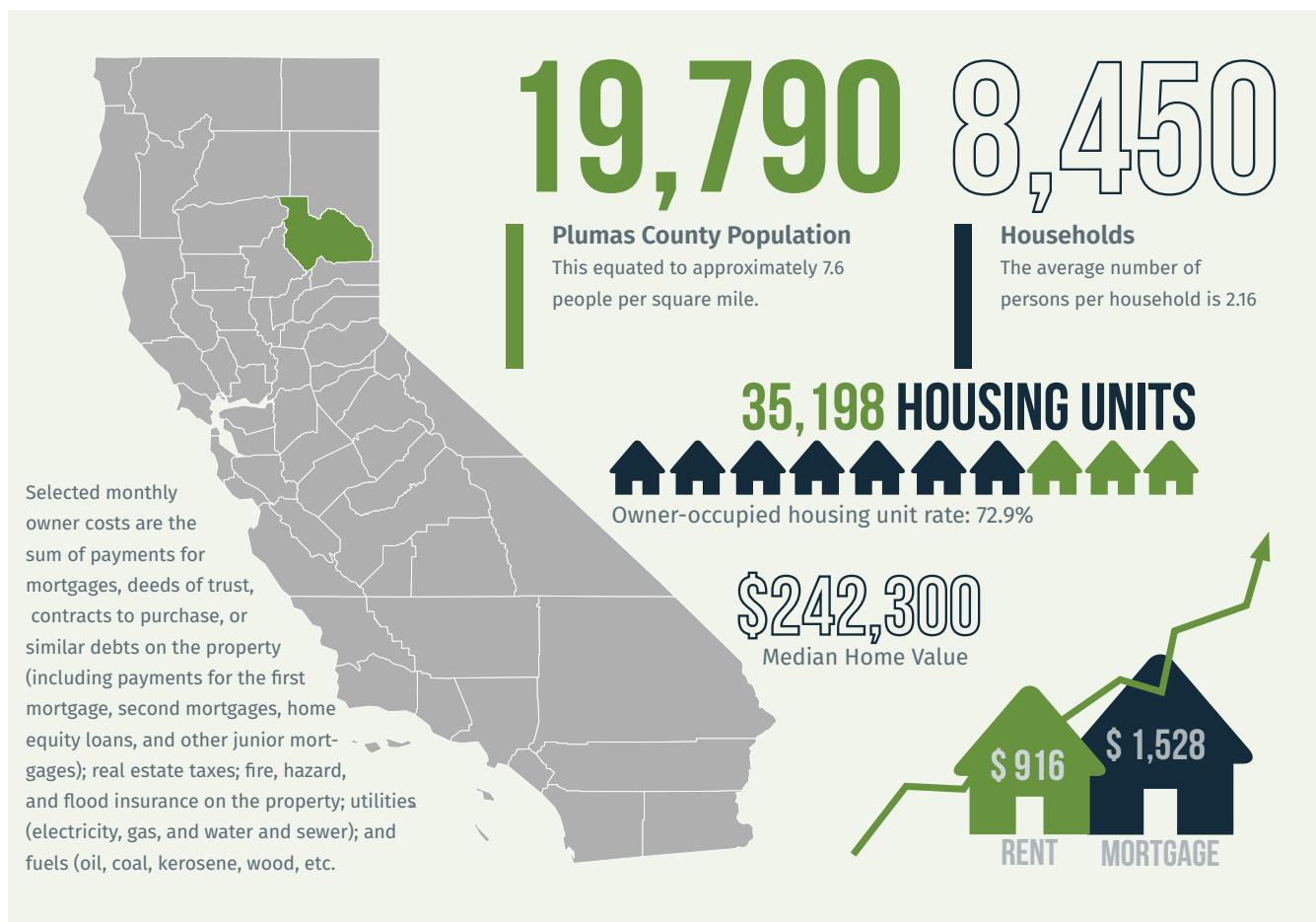
HEALTHCARE ACCESS

There was a mix of perceptions about healthcare access pre-fire. Some stakeholders stated that there was no concern pre-fire and others ranked it as a high concern. There is a lack of specialists, which is a similar challenge that other rural communities face. Plumas District Hospital (in Quincy), Seneca Healthcare District (in Chester), and Eastern Plumas Healthcare (in Portola) do have emergency services; for severe medical needs patients are transported out of Plumas County. These hospitals are part of healthcare districts which are public entities that provide community-based healthcare services to residents throughout the state. They respond to the needs in



Ashkan Forouzan, Unsplash

their district by providing a range of services, which may include a hospital, clinic, skilled nursing facility or emergency medical services; as well as education and wellness programs. Each healthcare district is governed by a locally elected Board of Trustees who are directly accountable to the communities they serve. Morrison's observation is that healthcare access was limited pre-fire; the rurality of Plumas County, the lack of competitive wages, and the lack of available housing made it difficult to recruit providers (especially highly qualified providers) contributing to limited healthcare access.



Post-Dixie Fire: Top Issues Identified by Stakeholders

HOUSING

While the lack of housing was a strong concern pre-fire, the Dixie Fire significantly worsened an already tight housing market in Plumas County. Housing was identified by almost all the stakeholders as the preeminent concern, emerging as the clear priority during the course of the interviews. It is viewed by many as an emergency situation for the Plumas County social safety net. With the loss of at least 600 housing units combined with the already low rental vacancy, there is a very serious housing gap in Plumas County for all income levels. The urgent need for more affordable housing for the most vulnerable and for the middle class who were under-insured or uninsured emerged during the interviews.



A sign made by 4-H students stands in the ruins of Greenville in Plumas County. Photo: Toni Scott

CAPACITY

The lack of capacity – particularly as it relates to skilled, experienced personnel –

emerged as another pressing concern during the interviews. Nearly every agency and organization reported being severely understaffed. This has been considerably intensified following the Dixie Fire. A substantial amount of nonprofit work is completed by volunteers, who are overworked and experiencing burnout, compounded with their own personal trauma and secondary trauma. Many of the volunteers are dedicating significant time over and above their paying jobs; some are working 40 hours or more a week on recovery; for those that are paid, funding for their positions may be secured only for a few months. A lack of

availability of professional staff and systems is hindering their effectiveness in meeting the overwhelming needs of the community and threatening the very viability of the entire Plumas County social safety net.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development emerged as another prevalent concern as stakeholders see the success of business and economic growth and development as critical to the success of the social safety net in a post-fire landscape. While there seemed to be an awareness of the complexity of economic development for a very rural county with a small population, it was often coupled with a sense of opportunity for and a need to capitalize on this moment to shift the economic development trajectory. Economic development is also seen as intertwined with addressing the housing crisis and the need for tax revenue to support services. Many stakeholders noted that the lack of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) at the county level will continue to hinder the ability to access certain federal and state funds.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Most stakeholders ranked behavioral health services as a high concern, although generally not as high of a concern as housing. Many of those interviewed noted that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for these services pre-fire and then the Dixie Fire exacerbated the need even more. There were a small number of stakeholders that ranked it as a very low concern, often believing while there could be more availability of services, there are services in place for those who really need them. Morrison's observation is that in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Dixie Fire, there is a strong need to bolster behavioral health and mental health services; although there can still be hesitancy to access these services, people are more open to seeking services and the impact/trauma of the pandemic and the fire is deeply felt by those living in Plumas County. Stakeholders noted the difficulty for the middle class in accessing behavioral and mental health services – those who qualify for government assistance programs are able to access services, those with significant wealth can pay for needed services, but often times the middle class cannot afford to seek these services.

TRAUMA

Closely related to behavioral health and mental health, the theme of trauma and the need for trauma education and trauma-informed care for all sectors of Plumas County and segments of the population surfaced throughout the interviews.

UNMET NEEDS

Multiple nonprofits, government agencies (including law

enforcement), businesses, philanthropy organizations, and churches have stepped in to try to meet the vast unmet needs during and in the wake of the fire. Unmet needs are still very much present in this current stage of recovery and efforts to fund and provide for these needs continue to be critical to move people towards stabilization, recovery, and rebuilding.

GOVERNMENT

Many stakeholders expressed significant frustration with government agencies. There was frustration expressed in: the lack of leadership in the recovery effort, the lack of leadership in economic development, the slowness of government, the perceived lack of communication which has compounded the lack of trust, and a lack of responsiveness. Additionally, stakeholders noted the lack of coordinated/joint leadership between federal, state, and county government which contributes to the frustration and often to confusion. Morrison also observed that there is a lack of capacity that likely contributes to the lack of responsiveness and the frustration. There are many critical job openings at government agencies and the low salaries for these positions compounded by the lack of available housing all contribute to the difficulty in finding qualified candidates to fill these key positions.



Photo by Rodnae Productions, Pexels

TRIBAL MEMBERS, CHILDREN, AND THE ELDERLY

Stakeholders expressed significant concern about the gaps in services for these vulnerable and underserved populations and the importance of strengthening the social safety net in the recovery and rebuilding process for them. Greenville was a hub of social services for tribal members and its destruction further exacerbated the gap

in access to social safety net services for this population; furthermore, it compounds and deepens the trauma this population was already carrying before the fire. There is a deep sense of the loss of community among the tribal population. Children have experienced a lot of trauma between the pandemic and the fire. Services for the elderly shrank during the COVID-19 pandemic causing further isolation. These are seen as the most vulnerable populations among stakeholders.

CHILDCARE

The strong need for childcare and after school care was a key theme that arose through the interviews. There was a shortage of childcare before the fire which has been exacerbated significantly after the fire. Additionally, childcare is seen as key to supporting the workforce.

HEALTHCARE

The perspectives on the quality of healthcare and healthcare access were mixed among the stakeholders. There was a general sense that the medical service issues in Plumas County are following the rural pattern. Some perceive healthcare access as good for the rural location, but definitely lacking in specialty healthcare services; others perceive healthcare access as significantly inadequate. The perception of the lack of access often had to do with the limited days in which healthcare is available in certain communities as well as due to the lack of providers. As is the case with other sectors, the lower salaries for these positions (compared to other areas) compounded by a lack of housing availability is seen to contribute to the difficulty in finding more qualified medical professionals. Stakeholders noted that those with financial resources often go outside of Plumas County to receive care and to receive most specialty care services people have to travel outside of Plumas County. Morrison observed that the need to often travel far distances for basic medical care as well as the need to go outside of Plumas County for specialty care limits access particularly for vulnerable populations. Of note, there is no pediatrician and no psychiatrist in Plumas County. Additionally, for Greenville, the pharmacy was destroyed by the fire and therefore those who need prescriptions must travel long distances to get them (to Quincy or Chester). For the reasons identified above, this is a significant barrier as it relates to healthcare for the lower-income and the elderly.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation was identified over and over again as a significant barrier to Plumas County residents accessing needed services; stakeholders noted this is especially true of the lower-income, elderly, tribal members, overlooked, and underserved populations. Similar to pre-fire condi-

tions, those most in need of services often do not have reliable transportation, might not have a car, and/or might not be able to afford the gas needed to make the drive (often to Quincy or Chester) to access services. There is an operating bus line, but service is limited and to make the trek to Quincy or Chester from other parts of Plumas County by bus requires a lot of time. There are affordable housing complexes that provide transportation, but it is first come, first serve, and not sufficient for the need/demand for transportation by residents.

COMMUNICATION

Though the efforts of the Funders Roundtable and Dixie Fire Collaborative were applauded by most interviewed,

the majority of those interviewed noted a continued communication gap and gap in collaboration between agencies, organizations, and with the community.

HIGH SPEED INTERNET

The need for high speed internet was continually expressed. Although the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that 77.9 percent of the population in Plumas County has a broadband internet subscription; those interviewed report that internet access for most is very slow, often irregular, or out-of-service. It is seen as critical for facilitating better communication, for economic development, for attracting businesses, and for attracting remote workers to the area.



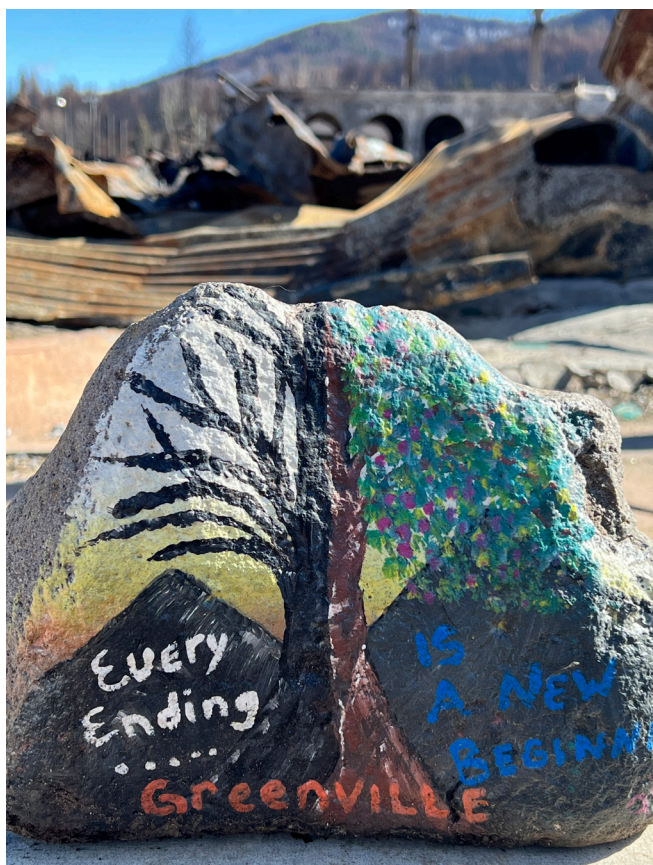
Fire-charred remains of a structure in Greenville in Plumas County. Photo: Toni Scott

Summary of Key Recommendations for Strengthening the Social Safety Net

- The following recommendations are for philanthropy, government, and other stakeholders to consider effective recovery will require all sectors to work together to strengthen the fragile social safety net in Plumas County.

HOUSING

A housing study is already underway, the completion of which will be critical to better understand the housing needs, the desires, the mix of rental and ownership, af-



A painted rock stands in the ruins of Greenville. Photo: Toni Scott

fordability levels, and locations. This should be conducted in conjunction with a county economic development study and/or regional economic development plan with a specific economic development plan for rebuilding Greenville to ensure the economy can support the proposed housing scenarios.

CAPACITY BUILDING

It is critical to invest in additional personnel and in training personnel. For many agencies and organizations that comprise the social safety net, adding one to four

experienced staff members would considerably increase capacity. Until more housing is built, if philanthropy and other investments could support outside contractors that could be shared among organizations, it has potential to move the needle on the staffing issues. Particular skillsets around accounting, bookkeeping, project management, and trauma-informed care is critical. Additionally, investment in fundraising efforts and seeking grant money will be critical to increase capacity; explore the hiring of grant writing personnel and personnel to administer grants.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Commission an economic development study. Work with Plumas County to develop a comprehensive economic development strategy for the County. Identify business training, mentorship, counseling, and business loan options. Continue to invest in job training and workforce development in key economic sectors.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Explore the feasibility of adding additional personnel like a psychiatrist and additional mental health counselors as well as additional telehealth services. Some telehealth options exist in Plumas County, but need to be promoted more for the community to be aware of how to access the services. Increase regular service days/hours of the Wellness Centers and service providers in locations outside of Quincy. Implement a countywide case management system to be used by service providers to better understand the history of clients to better meet their current needs.

CHILDCARE, SCHOOLS, KIDS & YOUTH

Conduct a childcare and after school care needs assessment to determine the current providers in each community, the number of providers needed to address the lack of childcare and afterschool care, assess personnel needs and costs to implement more robust childcare and after school care programs. Invest in and support organizations that are offering recreational activities for children and youth. This could include exploring the feasibility of youth centers in various communities. Seek to educate families about trauma and trauma-informed care for the children.

- To see a list of the interview questions and the social safety net stakeholders contacted and interviewed for this report, please see *Appendix A*.



The plume from the Dixie Fire in Plumas County billowing smoke as seen from nearby Deer Creek. Adobe Stock

ELDERLY

Create volunteer coalitions to reach out to the elderly. Improve communication of services to elderly. Host gatherings for the elderly to help reestablish the sense of community and connection. Promote the need for more caregivers for the elderly to allow them to stay in their home.

TRIBAL MEMBERS

Proactively reach out to and pursue tribal member involvement in the recovery process. Support community events to help tribal members re-establish and re-invigorate the Maidu culture, language, and architecture to help undergird the fabric of community in the wake of such devastating loss. Explore helping tribal organizations build capacity. If philanthropy and other investments could support personnel and/or outside contractors that could be shared among organizations, it has potential to move the needle on the staffing issues for tribal organizations. The approach to recovery and rebuilding among their community needs to be centered around tribal members and their leadership; not assuming their needs.

HEALTHCARE

Explore recruiting more providers / open positions (as there are multiple providers seeking to retire and it will be critical to replace them); a pediatrician; eye care professionals; and dental professionals. The lack of providers in these areas were cited as significant gaps in healthcare in Plumas County. A further analysis needs to be completed to confirm the feasibility/sustainability of these positions over the long term to recommend investment. As noted above, the lack of housing availability is a complicating factor. Explore additional telehealth options and mobile healthcare options (mobile dental, mobile doctors, etc.) as a way to increase services in the midst of the housing shortage in this rural area.

DISASTER CASE MANAGEMENT

Monitor case management adequacy and ratios and determine whether further investment is needed in additional case management personnel. Additionally, as part of monitoring adequacy it will be critical that disaster case managers are well-trained so they are able to effectively help those seeking to rebuild from the Dixie Fire. Disaster case managers have incredible influence in getting people the services and resources they need and to do so effectively they need to be well-trained.

COMMUNICATION

Create one website that can house all the resources available and that can be referred to across service providers. Update the website weekly and provide a printable downloadable flyer for service providers across the community to be able to print and post each week, and provide posts/links on social media weekly that can easily be shared by service providers and others across platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) to reach a wide range of the population. Invest in the effort to establish 211 and promote 211 once it is established.

TRANSPORTATION

Conduct a search for innovative transportation programs and the funding to provide additional transportation services and resources.

TRAUMA TRAINING

Expand trauma-informed training across sectors to aid the resilience and recovery of Plumas County post-Dixie Fire.

UNMET NEEDS

Continue to fund those working to meet unmet needs at this point in the recovery. It is imperative to continue to fund those working to meet unmet needs and to foster collaboration among the various organizations, agencies, churches, etc. to prevent siloes and the duplication of services in order to effectively work together to move people toward case management and ultimately rebuilding their lives.

HIGH SPEED INTERNET

Pursue grant funding for high speed internet for Plumas County. As of the writing of this report, there is a Broadband Workgroup that is pursuing grant funding for high speed internet with Plumas Sierra Telecommunications, a key player in this workgroup. Supporting this effort should be a high priority for Plumas County and others.

II. Introduction

- **Background and Purpose:** In December 2021, Morrison was engaged by the North Valley Community Foundation (NVCF) to conduct a needs assessment, evaluating and analyzing the social safety net for Plumas County.



The need for this assessment was identified by a roundtable of funders including NVCF, the Almanor Foundation, United Way of Northern California, Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Northern Nevada, Plumas Bank, Sobrato Philanthropies, Wells Fargo, Center for Disaster Philanthropy, The PG&E Corporation Foundation, S.H. Cowell Foundation, The Common Good Community Foundation, Catholic Charities of Northern Nevada, and Sierra Institute for Community and Environment to support intermediate and long-term recovery efforts in Plumas County. Collectively, this roundtable of funders held concerns about the fragility of the safety net in Plumas County in the wake of the devastation of the Dixie Fire. To more fully understand the impacts of the fire on the nonprofit sector, as well as the public and private sector, it was recognized that a comprehensive landscape analysis on the status and organizational health of the safety net organizations and agencies hardest hit in the wake of the Dixie Fire was needed.

Ultimately, it is the goal of the Funders Roundtable to partner with these organizations to provide funding towards their recovery efforts, technical assistance, and to develop sustainable pathways moving forward, for the long-term recovery and rebuilding of the entire community. Their intention is to use this analysis to assist nonprofit organizations open to innovation, adaptive strategies, and collaborations to better serve populations most in need.

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safety net from the World Bank, “Social safety net programs protect families from the impact of economic shocks, natural disasters, and other crises.” As such, assessing the social safety net includes researching government and nonprofit services, including food, shelter, housing, healthcare, behavioral health, case management, workforce development, and financial assistance available to lower-income and vulnerable populations. The report also utilizes the following definition for “vulnerable populations” from the Glossary of Essential Health Equity Terms, “Vulnerable populations are groups and communities at a higher risk for poor health {physical, mental, social} as a result of the barriers they experience to social, economic, political and environmental resources, as well as limitations due to illness or disability.”

To achieve the goal of a published Social Safety Net Needs Assessment, Morrison conducted one-on-one interviews with key social safety net service providers (government and nonprofits) and other key stakeholders identified by the leadership of the Dixie Fire Collaborative (DFC) as well as conducted secondary research. The DFC works to fulfill the unmet needs of Dixie Fire survivors and empower the community to rebuild through finding resources, organizing volunteers, raising money, and creating solutions.

Morrison met bi-weekly with NVCF and three leaders of the DFC throughout the project to provide updates on the project status; solicit input from them on key organizations, stakeholders to interview, the interview questions; to learn more about the context of Plumas County and the social safety net providers; as well as to gain insight on other issues that arose. Morrison developed the interview questions (see Appendix A for interview questions), requested feedback from these leaders, incorporated the feedback, and then began conducting interviews with the identified organizations, agencies, and stakeholders (see Appendix A for stakeholders contacted and interviewed).

The interviews were conducted one-on-one in-person, by video conferencing tools, or by phone. Morrison team members, Toni Scott, Managing Principal, and Hilary Tricerri, Consultant conducted the interviews.

Methodology

- As mentioned above, Morrison conducted 33 one-on-one interviews with key decision makers within social service agencies, nonprofit organizations, and other community stakeholders to assess the needs of the social safety net both pre- and post-fire. Additionally, Morrison conducted secondary research to better understand the context of the social safety net pre-fire.

INTERVIEWS

Morrison proposed one-on-one interviews as the primary methodology for gathering information on the social safety net in Plumas County to be able to establish trust and rapport with those interviewed to facilitate more transparent sharing; to understand more deeply the context and issues surrounding the social safety net in Plumas County; and to be able to ask follow up questions, as well as to be sensitive to the trauma experienced due to the fire by nearly all of those that were interviewed. To maintain confidentiality, individual responses beyond organizational information is not attributed to specific interview participants. Rather, Morrison aggregated the responses.

Morrison worked closely with NVCF and three DFC leaders to develop a master contact list for outreach to schedule interviews. Concurrently, Morrison developed interview questions which were reviewed by NVCF and three DFC leaders who provided input on the questions before Morrison finalized the interview questions.

Once the contact list was developed and the interview questions solidified, Morrison reached out to 79 different individuals/organizations for interviews; of those 79 reached, Morrison interviewed 33 stakeholders. Interviews were conducted between February 9, 2022 through March 30, 2022 by phone, by video, and in-person during a visit to Plumas County (February 16, 2022 – February 17, 2022). A full list of organizations contacted and invited to participate in the interview can be found in Appendix A.

Government agencies and nonprofit organizations from the following social safety net sectors were represented in the interviews: social services; housing; physical and behavioral health; disaster recovery; tribal organizations; children and youth; workforce and economic develop-

ment; public safety; the faith community; and environmental organizations. Additionally, there was representation from Chester, Greenville, Indian Valley, and Quincy, the main population centers directly impacted by the fire.

The interviews were informal, although Morrison developed interview questions to guide the interviews and to assess the strengths, gaps (weaknesses), opportunities, and threats to the social safety net both pre- and post-fire.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

Morrison also reviewed a number of minutes from community-wide meetings as well as conducted secondary research to analyze specific safety-net data for Plumas County. Documents reviewed for this study can be found Appendix B.

UNFOLDING LANDSCAPE

Disaster recovery includes both meeting immediate and short-term needs as well as planning for the long-term recovery and rebuilding of a community that may require years and sometimes decades – a process that everyone wishes could be accomplished exponentially faster. As the methodology of this report was one-on-one interviews and secondary research, the findings are based on stakeholder perceptions and the data available less than six months following the official end of the Dixie Fire. Plumas County is still in the early months of recovery efforts. This report is an analysis of findings, strengths, gaps, and potential recommendations to build a stronger safety net. The intent is to provide a starting place for a foundation or potential funders to build upon within a continually changing context. Recommendations have been made within these limitations and will need to be further evaluated, adjusted, and adapted to account for the changing current and evolving future context of Plumas County.

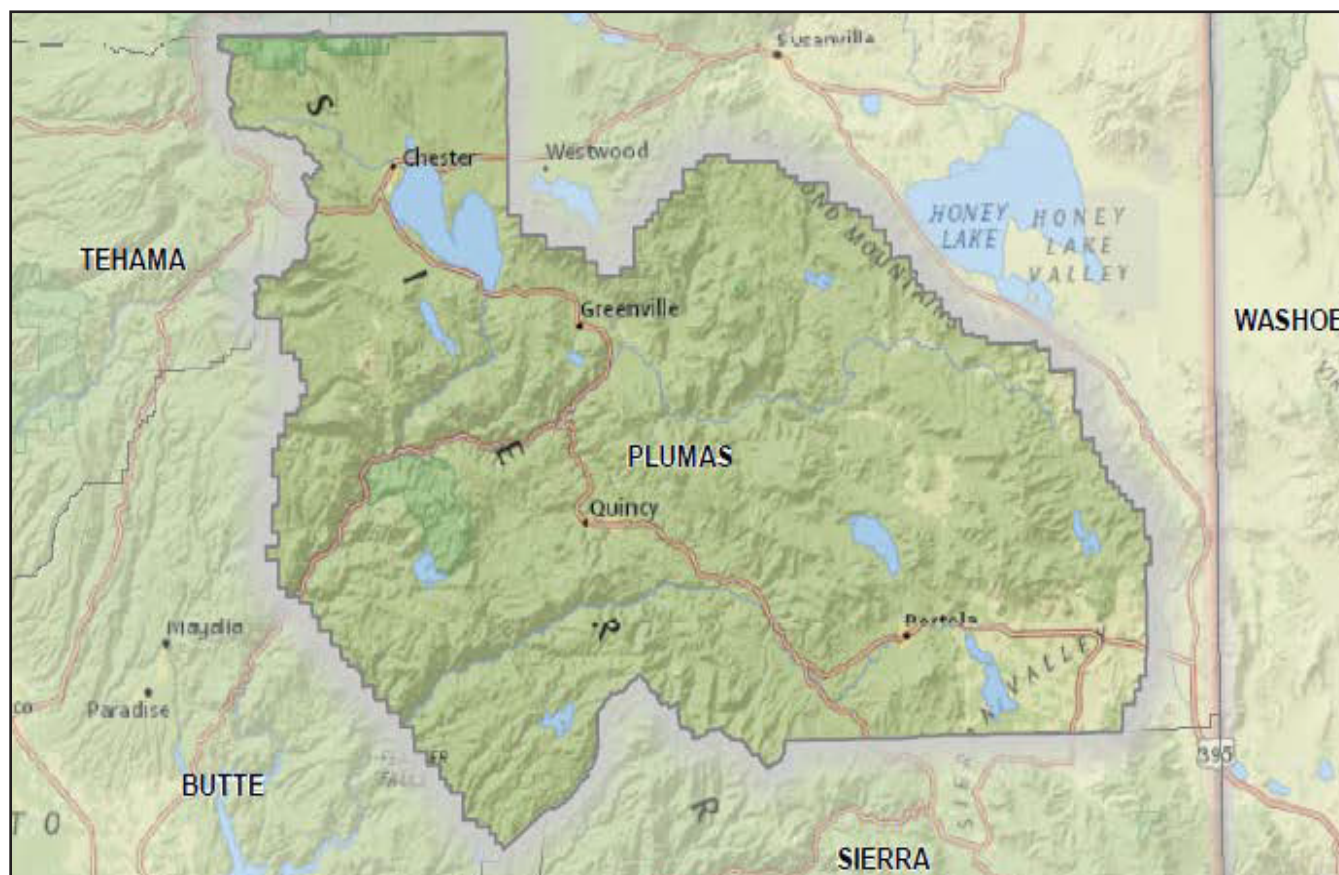
III. Pre-Dixie Fire Findings

- To understand the impact of the Dixie Fire on Plumas County it is critical to first understand the context of Plumas County pre-fire. This section provides: a pre-fire overview of Plumas County; a demographic overview of Plumas County; key social safety net statistics and highlights; a demographic overview of Greenville, which was destroyed during the fire; and a summary of stakeholder perceptions of the social safety net prior to the fire. Sources are cited throughout this section and include the U.S. Census Bureau, Plumas County specific studies and regional studies, California Department of Education, California Employment Development Department, among others

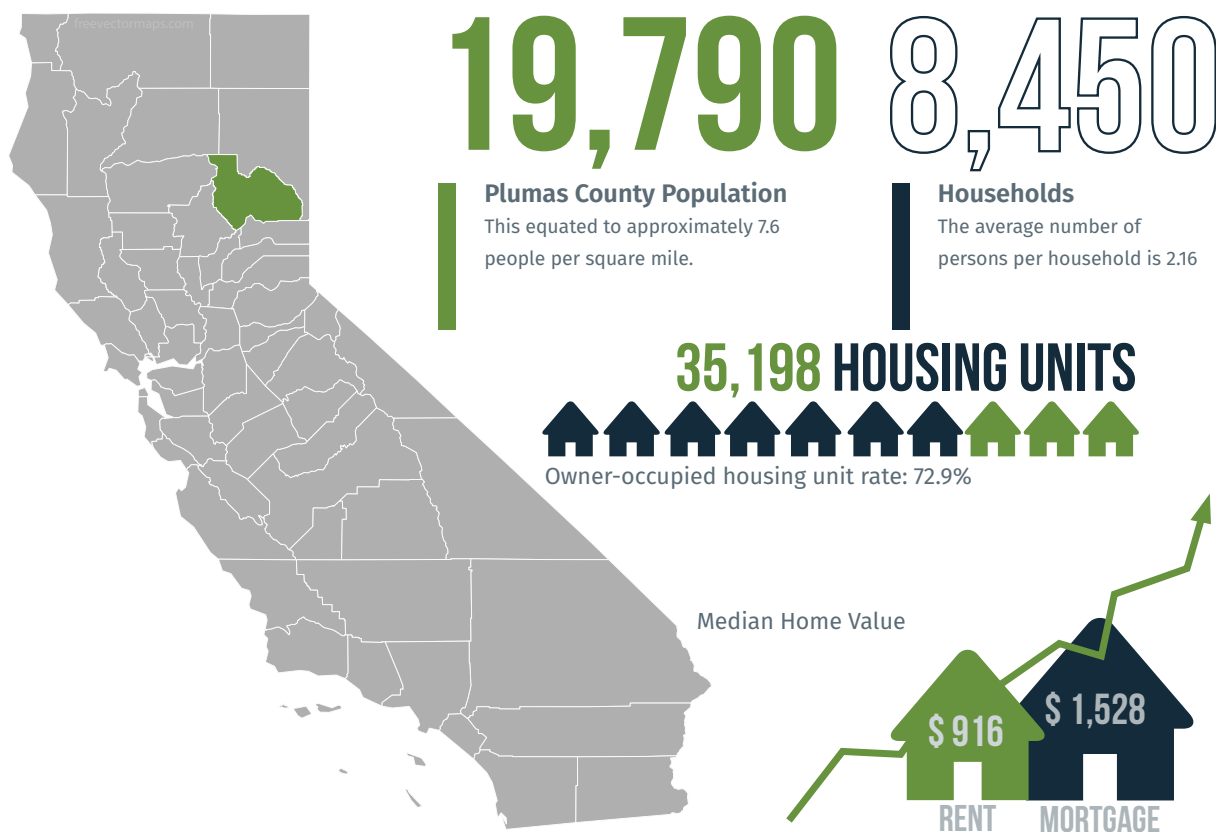
Overview of Plumas County

Plumas County is a rural county near the northeast corner of Northern California with stunning natural beauty and a population of 19,790. It is 2,613 square miles; the Feather River, and several of its forks, flow through the County; there are more than 100 lakes and 1,000 miles of rivers and streams; and U.S. National Forests cover over 70 percent of its area (over a million acres). Quincy is the unincorporated County seat and is about 80 miles from Oroville, California, and about 85 miles from Lake Tahoe and Reno, Nevada. The only incorporated city in Plumas County is Portola. Plumas County is bordered by Lassen Volcanic National Park, Lassen County, Shasta County, Tehama County, Sierra County, Butte County, and Yuba County.

There are five main population centers within Plumas County: East Quincy, Quincy, Chester, Greenville, and Portola.



- A list of research references can be found at the end of the report, and in *Appendix B*.



Selected monthly owner costs are the sum of payments for mortgages, deeds of trust, contracts to purchase, or similar debts on the property (including payments for the first mortgage, second mortgages, home equity loans, and other junior mortgages); real estate taxes; fire, hazard, and flood insurance on the property; utilities (electricity, gas, and water and sewer); and fuels (oil, coal, kerosene, wood, etc).

While East Quincy and Quincy are near one another, the other towns are a great distance from each other: it requires approximately 35 minutes to travel from Quincy to Greenville and over an hour from Quincy through Greenville to Chester. There are very few residents or small towns in between these population centers and often no cell or internet service available. Additionally, most of the connecting thoroughfares are mountain roads that are often two-lanes and can be difficult to traverse in the rain or snow. Understanding the rurality of the Plumas County is critical for recovery and rebuilding efforts – the geography of Plumas County powerfully shapes significant aspects of life for the population as well as the availability of services.

Demographic Overview of Greenville

In addition to understanding the demographics of Plumas County, it is also critical to cultivate an understanding of the specific demographics of Greenville, the town in Plumas County that was nearly completely destroyed by the fire. Greenville is the largest community in what is known as Indian Valley which also includes the communities of Taylorsville, Crescent Mills, Canyon Dam, and Genessee. The scenic valley is surrounded by mountains and has ranches, old barns, and grazing cattle. Greenville is a small town with a deep sense of history and community with

many families having lived in the area for generations. The Maidu Indians were the valley's original inhabitants and there is a strong community of Native Americans in the area with a rich history and profound ties to the land. Additionally, it is an important hub of services for the Native American population with Greenville Rancheria providing a medical and dental clinic and the Roundhouse Council Indian Education Center providing an afterschool program for Native Youth as well as a resource center for Indian Valley, among other organizations. Greenville was and continues to be the poorest area in Plumas County.

Social Safety Net Pre-Dixie Fire Secondary Research

The above demographic overview of Plumas County and Greenville provide important context in examining the health of the social safety net pre-fire. As discussed in Background and Purpose, the report utilizes the following definition of the social safety net from the World Bank, "Social safety net programs protect families from the impact of economic shocks, natural disasters, and other crises." Therefore when assessing Plumas County's social safety net Morrison researched government and nonprofit services, including food, shelter, housing, healthcare, behavioral health, case management, workforce development, and financial assistance available to lower-income

and vulnerable populations.

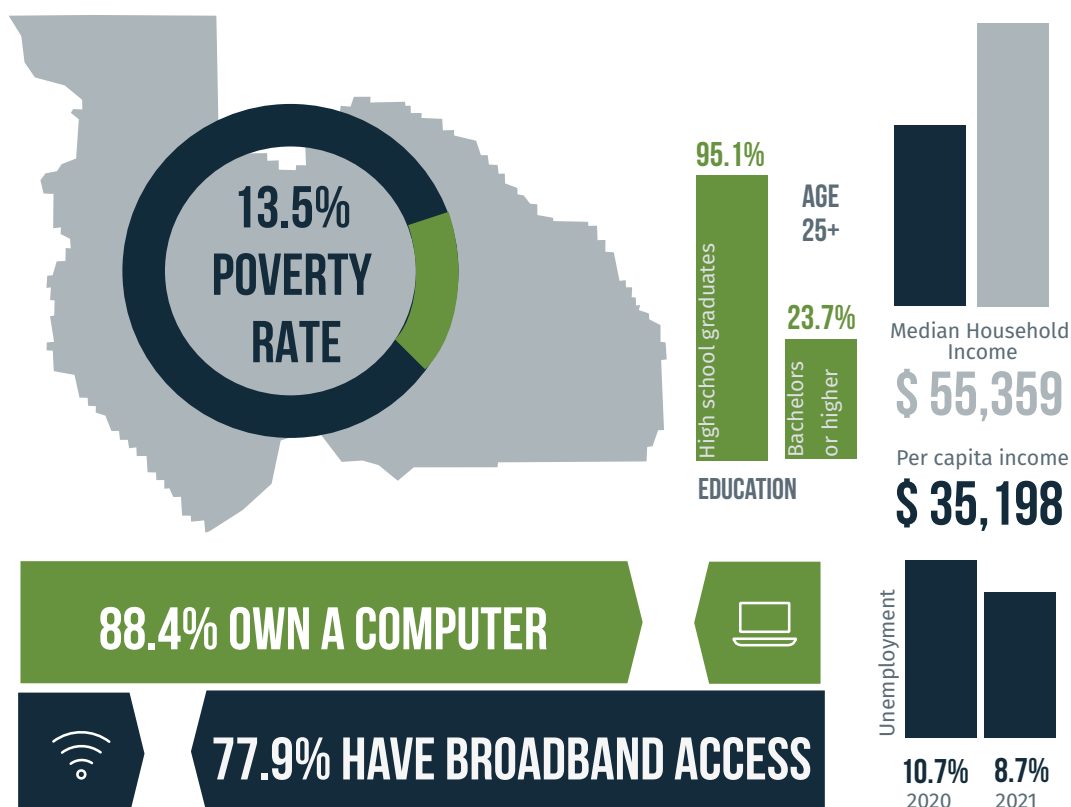
Detailed below are significant aspects and key indicators of the health of the social safety net pre-fire in Plumas County. As the below statistics and indicators show, the social safety net in Plumas County was strained before the fire. The rurality of Plumas County; the size of Plumas County, with great distances between population centers; the small population – which also often means less funding from the government (often determined by per capita rates) and therefore also less government services and less funding from private philanthropy (often more limited in small counties with a small number of funders making significant investments); a reluctance to accept additional government support and lack of funding at the Plumas County government level for services; among other factors contributed to the stress on the social safety net. Additionally, the cost of providing services can often be higher in rural areas as they must be delivered over a larger and more dispersed geographic area. The indicators, however, do not adequately reflect one of the key strengths of Plumas County: the strong sense of place and commitment to the community that the social service providers and the larger population possesses. This is explored more in the Stakeholder Findings on the Social Safety Net Pre-Dixie Fire. For some key indicators and metrics below, Plumas County metrics are compared to Lassen County and Mono County metrics which are both rural Northern California counties with similar sized populations.

KEY STATISTICS AND INDICATORS OF THE HEALTH OF THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Income and Poverty: As cited above, the median household income in Plumas County is \$55,359 with a per capita income of \$35,198. This is lower than neighboring Lassen County with a median household income of \$56,352, Mono County with a median household income of \$62,260, and the state of California with a median household income of \$75,235 (U.S. Census Bureau). Plumas County suffers from a 13.5 percent poverty rate; this is lower than Lassen County (15.5 percent, but higher than Mono County (9 percent) and California (11.5 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts: Plumas County, Lassen County, Mono County, and California).

HOUSING

Morrison reviewed several sources that provide useful data on the landscape of housing in Plumas County prior to the Dixie Fire. The sources referenced regarding housing include the: 1) Plumas County Housing Study (May 2020); 2) The Plumas County Community Health Assessment (October 2020); 3) U.S. Census Bureau Housing data for Plumas County; 4) U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) fair market rents 5) Plumas & Sierra Counties Plan to Address Homelessness (June 2020); and 6) U.S. News and World Report Healthiest Communities Assessment Ranking.





Downtown Greenville before the Dixie Fire. ©Dana Mite, totalescapes.com



Downtown Greenville after the Dixie Fire. Photo by Toni Scott

The purpose of the Plumas County Housing Study, published in May 2020, is to describe the general housing market conditions and to identify development of opportunities in Plumas County. The study noted the following key findings which provide important context when examining the status of housing pre-fire:

- “Plumas County’s largest age cohort is 65 years old or older, with 4,988 residents in this category (27 percent of the total population).
- After a steady decline in population from 2010 to 2015, the County’s population gradually increased between 2015 and 2019.
- The foundation of Plumas County’s economy is Local Government and Service Providing Industries. These industries are vulnerable to a decline in employment due to impacts of COVID-19.
- Two out of every three households earning less than \$35,000 pay 30 percent or more of household income on housing.
- The large majority of Plumas County households earn less than \$75,000 (66 percent) annually.
- The majority of residential units in Plumas County are detached single-family homes with 12,304 homes of 77 percent of total housing stock, mobile homes is the second largest housing type in the County after single-family detached structures, at 14 percent of all residential structures. This is much higher than the statewide mobile home rate of 4 percent.
- There is a clear shortage of smaller units for small households, and an oversupply of larger units. The Plumas County median sale price of single-family detached homes decreased by 8.7 percent from \$263,000 in 2016 to \$240,000 in 2019. {According to the U.S. Census Bureau from 2015-2019, \$242,300 is the median value of owner-occupied housing units}.
- There are multiple for-sale home submarkets across Plumas County, with Portola, Quincy, Chester, and Green-

ville each demonstrating distinct price points, based on a survey of current listings.

- Most likely due to COVID-19 impacts, a review of recent vacation home postings show that many of these homes are transitioning from weekly leases to lower priced and longer-term leases. This presents a potential opportunity to open up the rental market to more middle and lower income households by increasing the overall rental stock available to local residents.
- Plumas County has four distinct rental markets, which include market rate, rent-restricted affordable, short-term vacation rentals, and mobile home and special occupancy parks.
- There are 2,388 homeowners in Plumas County without a mortgage (39 percent of all homeowners). This statistic, as well as the high proportion of households that are smaller and have individuals over age 64, indicate that there is potential for a significant proportion of homeowners that prefer to sell their home to realize its equity and live in a low-maintenance apartment or small home. There is a significant shortfall of at least 2,199 units in Plumas County that are affordable to Low Income households.
- Plumas County has exceeded the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) production target for Moderate Income units, but has a shortfall of 22 Low Income units and 29 Very Low Income units.”

The Plumas County Community Health Assessment which is a report on the health and wellbeing of Plumas County residents between 2016 and 2019, also identifies housing as an area of concern. It states, “It is very difficult to find adequate affordable housing in Plumas County, and the housing inventory is low. Participants in focus groups reported that the cost of homeowner’s fire insurance in the Chester area had risen significantly after the Camp Fire in neighboring Butte County destroyed the town of Paradise. Rising housing costs are causing some residents

to relocate out of the area. It is difficult for some residents to sustain adequate housing, healthy food, and pay their utilities.”

In terms of rentals, the Plumas County Housing Study notes that since Plumas County is not within a larger Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), industry standard reports on the rental market are unavailable. The authors of the report conducted a survey of their own to gauge market rates. They found that average rent ranged from \$475 for a studio to \$888 for two-bedrooms and that there was a significant difference in the average rent between two bedroom one-bath units and 3-bedroom, 1-bath units. Their survey showed several affordable rental complexes that serve low-and very low-income residents.

Other sources that were examined to better understand the housing market for rentals in Plumas County were the U.S. Census Bureau data on housing and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) fair market rents. HUD fair market rents are estimates of 40th percentile gross rents for standard quality units within a metropolitan area or nonmetropolitan County; this is used by HUD to determine typical market rent. According to the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau (American Community Survey 2015-2019), the median gross rent in Plumas County is \$916. Fair market rents published by HUD in June 2021 for Plumas County (pre-fire) are as follows: Efficiency – \$618; 1-Bedroom – \$722; 2-Bedroom – \$937; 3-Bedroom – \$1,318; 4-Bedroom – \$1,569; 5-Bedroom – \$1,804; 6-Bedroom – \$2,040. Based on U.S. Census Bureau data and HUD fair market rents, rental costs significantly increased between when the Plumas County Housing Study was published and June 2021.

Additionally, Morrison reviewed the June 2020 Plumas & Sierra Counties Plan to Address Homelessness prepared by HousingTools for the two counties. The purpose of the plan is to lay out a focused and practical strategy for addressing the issue of homelessness in Plumas and Sierra Counties. The plan identified the following needs, gaps, and challenges in the continuum of housing solutions:

Needs and gaps:

- “All types of affordable rental housing
- Supportive Housing for individuals with special needs, including homeless individuals

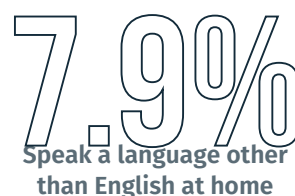
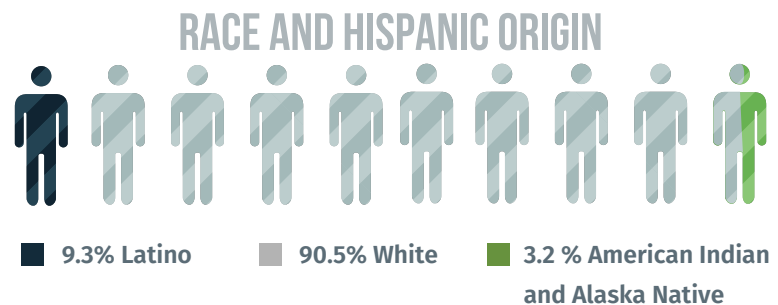
living with a serious mental illness

- Senior Housing/Assisted Living
- Sustainable funding sources to provide services for supportive housing residents
- Alternative housing other than returning to home of origin for those who are criminal justice involved with co-occurring disorders.”

Challenges identified in the report include:

- “Housing units in both counties increasingly being turned into vacation rentals
- Feather River College students from out of the area move here for school and impact existing housing shortages
- Exits from Transitional Housing are delayed due to poor tenant rental history and lack of available housing
- Potential capacity issues for water and sewer
- Restrictiveness of Housing Choice Eligibility based on criminal background. Local guidelines stipulate that any drug-related or violent charges on client record within the last three years make applicants ineligible for a voucher. This precludes much of our homeless population from eligibility.”

Morrison also reviewed data from U.S. News and World



The tribes in the area include: Greenville Rancheria of Maidu Indians, Enterprise Rancheria of Maidu Indians, Maidu Nation, Susanville Indian Rancheria, T'Si-akim Maidu, and the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California



Report Healthiest Communities Assessment Ranking. The U.S. News and World Report Healthiest Communities Assessment Ranking shows how nearly 3,000 U.S. counties and county equivalents perform in 84 metrics across 10 health and health-related categories including housing (population health, equity, education, economy, food and nutrition, environment, public safety, community vitality, and infrastructure). According to this source, Plumas County received a low ranking on housing affordability of 39 out of a scale of 100. A few notable housing affordability metrics include that 28.8 percent of households spend at least 30 percent of their income on housing, in comparison to the U.S. at 23.4 percent and its peer group (rural, high performing peer group) at 20.8 percent. Additionally, the work hours needed to pay for affordable housing is significantly higher in Plumas County at 63.1 hours versus California at 48 hours, the U.S. at 40.6 hours, and its peer group at 38.6 hours. Moreover, the report found the available housing shortfall (the availability of affordable housing relative to a community's low-income population) was a staggering -49.1 percent indicating a significant shortfall, even though it was a lower shortfall than the state, the U.S., or the peer group.

HOMELESSNESS

The Nor-Cal Continuum of Care 2020 and 2021 Point-in-Time Reports were reviewed to assess the extent of homelessness in Plumas County. The NorCal Continuum of Care (CoC) is a seven-county homeless consortium governed by an Executive Board that is charged by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to conduct a Point-in-Time (PIT) Count every odd year. This PIT Count develops important, person-specific data which helps communities to prioritize the most vulnerable and chronically homeless persons for rapid rehousing, transitional housing, or permanent housing resources. The PIT helps HUD and local CoCs to understand the number and characteristics of homeless individuals sleeping in shelters or on the street or other places not meant for human habitation. This one-night, unduplicated count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people within each CoC across the nation is reported using a standardized chart with various populations and subpopulations of homeless individuals and families. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the NorCal CoC received an exemption from HUD and did not conduct an unsheltered PIT count in 2021 for safety reasons and thus 2021 data only reflects sheltered homeless in Plumas County; therefore data from the 2020 PIT was also used to assess the number of unsheltered homeless in Plumas County pre-fire.

The total homeless population in Plumas County for the 2020 PIT survey was 115 with 77 unsheltered and 38 sheltered individuals. The number of sheltered homeless

in Plumas County for the 2021 PIT survey was 34; similar to the 2020 count. Assuming a similar total homeless population in 2020, those struggling with homelessness in Plumas County represent less than one percent of the population.

HEALTHCARE

According to U.S. News and World Report Healthiest Communities Assessment Ranking, which as described above shows how nearly 3,000 U.S. counties and county equivalents perform in 84 metrics across 10 health and health-related categories (population health, equity, education, economy, housing, food and nutrition, environment, public safety, community vitality, and infrastructure), Plumas County received a 58 overall score out of 100, exceeding the state average of 56, its peer group average of 57 (peer group: rural, high performing peer group), and significantly exceeding the U.S. average of 48.

Among others, some key metrics from the report to note include: in the "access to care metric" Plumas County has a greater hospital bed availability per 1,000 than either the state, the U.S., or their peer group (3.2 Plumas, 2.5 California, 1.9 U.S., and 1.8 peer group); a smaller population with no health insurance than those same groups; and a slightly greater primary care doctor availability than the U.S. or its peer group.

Morrison also reviewed the Plumas County Community Health Assessment, published October 2020, which is a report on the health and wellbeing of Plumas County residents for the period between 2016 and 2019; local healthcare providers and public health professions collaborate to compile the information which allows for a comprehensive understanding of social, economic, and health factors across Plumas County. The health priority areas that were found to most substantially affect the communities' health were: 1) transportation; 2) specialty care; 3) resource identification, access, and navigation; and 4) activities that promote social connections for youth and seniors.

TRANSPORTATION

The Health Assessment summarized the transportation challenges as follows: "Most of Plumas County is zoned as forest service land, and travel between communities is long and difficult during winter months. Residents face challenges due to the isolated and rural geography of the County. Transportation was emphasized both in focus groups and in key informant interviews. The Plumas County Probation Department noted that parents lacking transportation contributes to high truancy rates. During

the winter months, many parents are not able to get their children to bus stops due to unsafe weather conditions. Transportation challenges also affect obtaining medical care; including specialty care, dialysis, cancer treatment, and high-risk pregnancies. Limited transportation options can make access to specialty care difficult, especially during the winter months. During focus groups, seniors indicated that long travel times worsen pain or other health issues, making extended travel for care a poor option.”

“Only one hospital in Plumas County has the resources needed to deliver babies. Additionally, the perception of focus group participants was that there are limited services in the County for women experiencing high-risk pregnancies. Focus group participants in Chester reported having to travel to Susanville {Lassen County} for high-risk prenatal care. The limited prenatal services impose undue hardships on families that must travel out of the County to seek prenatal care, some of which must be seen weekly. Weekly visits for prenatal care have heavy impacts due to requesting time off work, paying for additional gas, and the ability to obtain transportation. There are no dialysis or cancer treatment providers in the County. Residents must travel to the Reno, Chico, or Truckee areas for care, entailing travel times between 1 to 3 hours. The lack of cancer and dialysis treatment centers in Plumas County are difficulties faced by already vulnerable populations.”

LIMITED SPECIALTY CARE OPTIONS

The Health Assessment summarized the challenges of limited specialty care options in the following way: “The financial position of the three clinical access hospitals (and associated clinics) makes it difficult to provide many specialty services, and patients are often referred to larger metropolitan areas. This entails travel out-of-county, which creates additional cost and challenges, especially during winter months with adverse weather. It is cost-prohibitive for local hospitals to maintain specialty providers on staff full time due to the relative number of patients. Telehealth options are used as much as possible, and traveling doctors are also contracted for periodic visits to the County. Even with these services, focus group respondents report this situation as a barrier to receiving care.”

RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION AND ACCESS

The Health Assessment summarized the challenges of resource identification and access as follows: “Many respondents expressed difficulty in identifying and locating resources in the County, even if these resources do exist. This was a frequently mentioned topic, especially among seniors, and appears to indicate a widespread barrier to accessing available services. The services mentioned include transportation, nutritional support, and social

support network resources. Options for these resources do exist in the County, but appear to be inadequately advertised.”

Activities that Promote Social Connection: The Health Assessment summarized the challenge of the lack of activities that promote social connection in the following way: “The fourth major theme from the Health Assessment’s qualitative data collection is a perception that there are limited opportunities for recreation, events promoting social connections, and community events across the County. This was mentioned most often in the youth and senior specific groups, or in reference to youth and seniors when mentioned by the broad focus group participants. Respondents often referenced the negative effects of not having other social engagement, including increased drug and alcohol use among teens, or increased social isolation among seniors.”

MENTAL HEALTH

In the U.S. News and World Report Healthiest Communities Assessment Ranking which is referenced and explained above, the mental health score for Plumas County is lower at 51 than their overall health score which is 58. Metrics for the mental health ranking include among others: adults with frequent mental distress which in Plumas County is a higher percentage than the state, but similar to its peer group at 14 percent; and deaths of despair (deaths due to suicide, alcohol-related disease and drug overdoses) which is strikingly higher than the state, the U.S. or its peer group at 80.5 deaths per 100,000 (33.2 California, 43.3 U.S., and 44.2 peer group).

The June 2020 Plumas & Sierra Counties Plan to Address Homelessness prepared by Housing Tools for the two counties, identified the significant gap of no psychiatrists in Plumas County. It noted that without any psychiatrists people had to rely on tele-psych services which consumers find “challenging to use and to connect with professionals in a meaningful way.” Other gaps cited include a lack of qualified behavioral health providers and that private insurance will not pay for services provided by County Behavioral Health Departments. The report also noted that one of the challenges, which is a result of the nature of rural counties, is that people live at a great distance from crisis services and the County has to expend a lot of time and effort to get people in crisis the resources they need.

Moreover the report states that, “Stigma and discrimination associated with mental health are still barriers to overcome. Couple this with the small population in both {Plumas and Sierra} counties and a perceived or real lack of anonymity (due to the close social and family connections which exist in these communities), and individuals

may choose not to seek help.”

ELDERLY

As noted in the Plumas County Housing Study, Plumas County’s largest age cohort is 65 years or older which at the time represented 27 percent of the population. This increased according to U.S. Census Bureau data which now demonstrates that 28.9 percent of Plumas County residents are 65 years and over. The Plumas County Community Health Assessment states, “Plumas County has an aging population. It is often difficult for seniors to receive the healthcare needed to live healthy lives. There is a lack of specialty care to meet the needs of the aging population. There is no geriatric specialty care, and seniors need to be referred out of the County to receive adequate care. Seniors have challenges with transportation, seeking medical services, heating their homes, access to healthy food, and experiencing high levels of isolation. During the winter months, it is difficult for seniors on fixed incomes to afford the cost of heating their homes adequately. Many homes in the area have wood stoves as the primary source of heat. Wood stoves can be an issue for the elderly due to the physical requirements needed to cut, stack, and bring wood into the home.” However, the report also notes that, “although the County has a large senior population, there are fewer people over the age of 65 living in poverty when compared to the state average.”

DISABLED (UNDER 65 YEARS OF AGE)

Nearly twelve percent of the population in Plumas County has a disability. This is a higher percentage than Mono County (10.6 percent), and the state (6.7 percent), but lower than Lassen County (13.3 percent).

RACIAL DIVERSITY

Over 90 percent of Plumas County is white alone with 9.3 percent Latino and 3.2 percent American Indian and Alaska Native alone. The tribes in the area include: Greenville Rancheria of Maidu Indians, Enterprise Rancheria of Maidu Indians, Maidu Nation, Susanville Indian Rancheria, T’Si-akim Maidu, and the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California.

EDUCATION (OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE):

Ninety-five percent of the population of Plumas County are high school graduates or higher and 23.7 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher. For comparison, this is higher than Lassen County with 83.2 percent of the population having a high school diploma or higher and only 12.9 percent of the population possessing a bachelor’s degree or higher. In Mono County, 88.6 percent possess a high school degree or higher and 28.8 percent have a

bachelor’s degree or higher. In California, 83.3 percent are high school graduates or higher with 33.9 percent having a bachelor’s degree or higher.

CHILDCARE

According to The Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center, in 2019 in Plumas County only 27.3 percent of children in working families had an available child care slot. This is similar to both Lassen and Mono counties which were at 27.3 percent and 23.6 percent respectively.

FOOD INSECURITY

According to Feeding America, Plumas County has a food insecurity rate of 13.4 percent (2,500 food insecure people); this exceeds both the state food insecurity rate (10.2 percent) and the national food insecurity rate (10.9 percent). Of the 13.4 percent of food insecure people, 39 percent are above SNAP or other nutrition programs’ threshold of 200 percent poverty and 61 percent are below SNAP or other nutrition programs’ threshold of 200 percent poverty. Among children, Feeding America shows a very high food insecurity rate in Plumas County – a staggering 17.2 percent (540 food insecure children) which is higher than the state (13.6 percent) and national (14.6 percent) averages.

FREE OR REDUCED PRICE MEALS

Based on data from the California Department of Education, an average of 57.2 percent of K-12 students in Plumas County were eligible for the free and reduced meal program for the 2020-2021 school year (most recent data). This is similar to Mono County with an average of 55.6 percent and Lassen County with an average of 57 percent of students eligible for the free and reduced meal program. To qualify for a free lunch under the federal guidelines, a family of four must make less than \$34,000 a year; for a reduced-price lunch the annual income must be less than \$48,000. However, these are federal standards and do not take into account the high cost of living in California.

PUBLIC SUPPORTS (MEDI-CAL, CALFRESH)

According to the most recent data from the California Department of Healthcare Services, the total number of people eligible for Medi-Cal in Plumas County is 6,866 (October 2021 data, published January 2022). According to Kids Data, the Medi-Cal average monthly enrollment for children from birth to 20 years old for Plumas County is as follows:

While there has been a decrease in the average Medi-Cal enrollment for those under 1 years old, there has been a significant increase in enrollment in the other age groups over the years.

According to the California Department of Social Services CalFresh Data Dashboard, in January 2021 (most recent data available) there were 2,302 persons enrolled in CalFresh in Plumas County, representing 1,397 households. There were 2,078 CalFresh/Medi-Cal dual enrollees.

TRANSPORTATION

As discussed under Healthcare above, transportation was identified as a significant challenge in the Plumas County Community Health Assessment. Additionally, the Plumas & Sierra Counties Plan to Address Homelessness identified the following needs, gaps, and challenges in transportation: there are no options for last minute transportation needs, there is limited transit service days and time, and transportation arranged through Medi-Cal requires significant advanced planning. The report did note that Plumas County Behavioral Health does provide transportation services, gas assistance, and bus passes for clients.

BUSINESS/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

According to California's Employment Development Department in May 2021 (pre-fire) the workforce in Plumas County was divided into the following: 5,860 in the service providing industry, 2,480 total government employees, 4,320 in private industry, and 6,800 total nonfarm (60 total farm). The average unemployment rate for 2021 in Plumas County was 8.7 percent; in 2020 it was 10.7 percent (California Employment Development Department, Plumas County Profile, Plumas County Labor Force Data).

Stakeholder Findings on the Social Safety Net Pre-Dixie Fire

The themes that arose during the stakeholder interviews were very similar to what Morrison found to the secondary research data. Many stakeholders characterized significant gaps in the social safety net as existing pre-fire. Additionally, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the social safety net was referenced frequently. Key pre-fire themes that emerged from interviews that echo the secondary research include:

- The housing market was tight pre-fire. Housing was hard to secure pre-fire and more housing was needed at all income levels with the lack of sufficient affordable housing impacting the most vulnerable pre-fire. Rentals were also in limited supply. The Camp Fire was also cited as impacting housing availability as people who were displaced from that fire in nearby Butte County moved to Plumas County. For Chester, stakeholders noted that the gap in housing availability and affordability for those who live and work in the area was also compounded by the

number of housing units that are second homes.

- Behavioral health services were perceived to be limited before the fire. There was a lack of awareness about behavioral health services and a lack of communication about their availability. The COVID-19 pandemic seemed to increase awareness and decrease the stigma a little about seeking behavioral health and mental health services. There were a lack of providers to meet the need pre-fire and some referenced long waiting lists to see a provider. Having the Wellness Centers located in communities outside of Quincy (Greenville, Chester, Portola) helped increase access to behavioral health services – people no longer needed to drive to Quincy to access them.
- Homelessness was not considered a large issue pre-fire by most stakeholders.
- Economic development was an expressed concern by many stakeholders pre-fire. Stakeholders largely reported that economic development was lacking pre-fire and also referenced the lack of a countywide economic development plan or strategy and the lack of an economic development agency. Plumas County was not part of an Economic Development Corporation, did not have a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and did not have an Economic Development Director position for Plumas County. Stakeholders saw these constraints as largely due to a lack of political will and they were seen as significantly limiting the potential of economic development in the County. Some stakeholders also noted that the county's Chambers of Commerce operated in siloes pre-fire.
- Many characterized the lack of childcare as a substantial issue before the fire, although there were more options than post-fire. There were adequate, but limited, childcare availability/options pre-fire which impacted parents' ability to seek and retain employment. The COVID-19 pandemic also strained the already small number of providers and caused some childcare providers to close their doors.
- The schools were generally seen as providing solid education, but there were comments about the strain that the COVID-19 pandemic put on the mental health of the children and staff, learning loss, and a lack of children being able to participate in distance learning due to internet connectivity. Those involved with the schools noted they were seeing more time spent in managing behaviors than in teaching, even pre-fire.
- There seemed to be a sense of disconnect between the tribal members and many of the social safety net providers. There was expressed concern for this population by many of the stakeholders interviewed, but also a lack of knowledge about the status of services for this population. Although there were some strong working relationships between tribal organizations with a few safety net agencies/organizations, the general disconnect and sense of being left out was also echoed in the interviews

with tribal organizations. It was noted that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the sense of isolation among tribal youth and the elderly, negatively impacting both populations. The lack of transportation was cited as a significant contributor to making services difficult for tribal members to access. The importance of the connection to the land for tribal members was also discussed.

- There was a mix of perceptions about elderly services pre-fire. Some stated it was not much of a concern and that there were sufficient services for seniors, including meal support programs. Others stated it was a high concern. It is Morrison's observation that services for the elderly were limited, but in place before the pandemic; elderly services were very impacted by COVID-19 which forced a significant contraction in available services for the elderly.
- Transportation availability was cited as a significant barrier to accessing services pre-fire.
- There was a mix of perceptions about healthcare access pre-fire. Some stakeholders said that there was no concern pre-fire and others ranked it as a high concern. It was noted by stakeholders that there was a lack of specialists, which is a similar challenge that other rural communities face. The loss of the hospital in Greenville a decade ago was mentioned several times as continuing to have an impact on healthcare access in the community.
- There was a general perception pre-fire that service providers operated primarily in their siloes and some were territorial. Some perceived the service providers to be very collaborative and others very territorial.
- Access to legal services was never mentioned by stakeholders when discussing strengths and weaknesses pre- or post-fire.

In addition to the data discussed above, other key themes that arose during stakeholder interviews that provide important context for Plumas County include:

The Rurality of Plumas County

Understanding the rurality of the County is critical in understanding Plumas County – the geography of Plumas County powerfully shapes significant aspects of life for the population as well as the availability of services. As discussed above, Quincy, which is the County seat is a great distance on mountain roads from the other primary population centers. The geographic isolation of the County and the vast distances between the various communities is a constant challenge in providing services and creates natural geographic siloes that can be hard to overcome.

Stakeholders viewed the lack of funding as a primary barrier to a thriving social safety net in Plumas County, which was also noted to be similar to other rural counties. When referencing the lack of funding they often meant both a lack of funding from the government and philanthropy. Social safety net providers were seen as understaffed and underpaid – like other rural counties' providers.

Additionally, many stakeholders discussed attitudes that can be barriers to seeking services among some of the population in the County. Stakeholders shared that Plumas County residents have chosen to live in a rural area, with space and privacy seemingly being attractive. It was noted that Plumas County residents are very self-reliant and independent and that there can be a strong undercurrent of distrust of the government, especially the federal government, among these residents. Stakeholders shared some are willing to access help, some believe help is for those that are "worse off", and it was noted that there was often a lot of resistance to mental health services and services related to COVID-19 prevention as well. Moreover, in a small community it can be hard (or perceived to be hard) to access services without others finding out, which can be a barrier to accessing services.

Similarly, stakeholders discussed Plumas County government's reluctance to take more federal and state government money than required. As a result, it was perceived by several stakeholders that additional government funding to increase the capacity of the County to offer social safety net services or to administer additional funding was rarely pursued. This is seen to be a major hindrance in post-fire efforts.

With such a large county and population centers separated by huge distances, communication about safety net resources was a challenge pre-fire. Compounding the struggle with communication was also the lack of a printed newspaper where people could find out about resources more easily. It is perceived that many people did not and still do not know where to look to find services.

An additional theme that emerged during the interviews is that there is a deep sense of history in the County, particularly in Greenville, with many residents having family who have lived in the area for generations with both the Native American population and the non-native population. There is a strong sense of place, history, and commitment to the community that runs deep and is important in understanding the pre-fire context of Plumas County.

IV. Post-Dixie Fire Findings

- The Dixie Fire began Tuesday, July 13, 2021 and burned nearly 1 million acres of land across five counties: Plumas, Butte, Lassen, Shasta, and Tehama before it was considered contained October 25, 2021, 103 days later. It is the second largest wildfire in California history after the August Complex Fire.

In total there were 95 structures damaged and 1,329 structures destroyed by the fire and one fatality.

According to CalOES at least 600 of the structures destroyed were residential. The fire threatened 14,000 more structures. The fire tore through the town of Greenville and decimated most of what was in its path. The Greenville Rancheria lost their medical and dental facilities, the tribal office, the environmental office, as well as two fire trucks and other vehicles in the fire. The Dixie Fire impacted every person in Plumas County – whether directly or indirectly, including the social safety net providers.

The magnitude of the Dixie Fire would have overburdened any region's social safety net, and has been especially detrimental to the less vibrant system of care in rural Plumas County. However, there is an astounding level of concern and sense of commitment to the region by all the stakeholders interviewed. The ties to Plumas County often go back generations and individuals are deeply ingrained in the fabric of the community. This existed pre-fire and has grown post-fire. The long-term recovery group called the Dixie Fire Collaborative (DFC) organized quickly and is making progress in facilitating more collaborative and less siloed efforts for recovery. The Funders Roundtable, which brings together multiple funders to fund recovery efforts and to prevent duplication of funding, is also an impressive collaborative effort for other areas stricken by disaster to model. Even as a small county, there are multiple service providers, nonprofits, government agencies, churches, philanthropic organizations, and individuals that have stepped in to meet enormous needs and gaps in the social safety net in the wake of such a massive disaster.

While there is such strength in the community and the immediate response to the disaster, the safety net has been and will continue to be significantly strained by the extent of the needs and the vast geographic distances required to travel to meet those needs. The COVID-19 pandemic put additional pressure on many aspects of the social safety net and the Dixie Fire exponentially exacerbated the pressure on the social safety net.

Following is a summary of themes and observations that emerged from the one-on-one interviews with stakeholders about the status of the social safety net in Plumas County following the Dixie Fire. Many stakeholders expressed that the Dixie Fire magnified the gaps that existed in the social safety net pre-fire, but also that it seems there is more openness to receiving services post-disaster. Housing was identified as the utmost concern, almost universally, by those interviewed. Capacity was another top concern of stakeholders. Additionally, economic development emerged as another prevalent concern as stakeholders see the success of business and economic growth and development as critical to the success of the social safety net in a post-fire landscape.

Post-Fire Themes

Housing: While the lack of housing was a strong concern pre-fire, the Dixie Fire significantly worsened an already tight housing market in Plumas County. Housing was identified by almost all the stakeholders as the preeminent concern, emerging as the clear priority during the course of the interviews. It is seen as an emergency situation for the Plumas County social safety net by many. With the loss of at least 600 residential units combined with the already low rental vacancy, there is a very serious housing gap in the County. One breakdown of the number of residential units lost in the fire includes: 446 single family single-story residences, 66 single family multi-story residences, 6 multi-family single-story residences, 2 multi-family multi-story residences, 54 motor homes, 17 triple-wide mobile homes, 48 double-wide mobile homes, and 37 single-wide mobile homes (FEMA data).

Housing is particularly an urgent need in Greenville where a large number of houses were lost during the Dixie Fire. It is also seen as a substantial need in other areas of Plumas County that lost housing due to the fire and/or whose housing markets tightened due to people relocating to these areas as a result of the fire. Stakeholders cited a low stock of available housing across income ranges and for both home-owners and renters. There was relief expressed that the low-income housing complexes

survived the fire, but a clear sense that there is a great need for more low-income and affordable housing. It was also noted that people are not sure where to go to find out information and assistance about housing which is an additional barrier for people finding housing resources.

For Chester, stakeholders noted that the gap in housing availability and affordability for those who live and work in the area is also compounded by the number of housing units that are second homes. According to U.S. Census Bureau data for Chester, there are 1,035 occupied housing units and 215 vacant housing units (H1 Occupancy Status). Another U.S. Census Bureau data chart, “Vacant – Current Residence Elsewhere” (B25005) shows a total of 274 vacancies with current residences of owners elsewhere.

Several stakeholders noted that people are struggling to find suitable housing and in the meantime are living in storage units, cars, tents, and/or couch surfing. One stakeholder shared that an individual they knew put in an application for a rental unit and discovered there were 70 applications for that same unit. Another poignantly shared that an out-of-town individual who was coming to the community to provide in-home care services would sleep in their car, in freezing temperatures, with the car running, because they could not secure a hotel room. Another stakeholder noted the need for emergency housing in child welfare. This person shared a story about a teenager who could not be placed for three days and the staff had to take turns sleeping in the office until they could place the teenager because of the shortage of resource families providing emergency housing. The need was there before the fire, but there was a loss of some resource family homes during the fire which has magnified the need. Another stakeholder noted how not having a permanent home can impact children in the foster care system by sharing a story about a grandmother who is caring for her grandchildren; however, because she lost her home in the fire the children were taken away from her until she could find more stable housing. The stakeholder noted the trauma upon trauma these children are experiencing as a result of the lack of housing.

Many stakeholders also noted the housing struggle for those that were either under-insured or un-insured and who lost their homes or rentals in the fire. Their ability to pursue housing post-fire is extremely limited and often there is a sense of embarrassment which creates a barrier to seeking assistance for housing.

Additionally, the need for housing is seen as intimately intertwined with economic development as many stakeholders noted that it is almost impossible to fill open positions in their agencies, organizations, and businesses due to a lack of housing. Potential employees literally cannot find housing and so either must move out of the area or cannot relocate to the area for work. Many also noted that the lack of housing prevents attracting qualified people to apply for open positions. Vendors that are working on rebuilding the community need housing. Moreover, the prices of homes and of rentals have skyrocketed since the fire, further exacerbating the housing crisis. One stakeholder conveyed the high importance of housing by stating, “It is the largest single threat to ongoing economic success.”

CAPACITY

The lack of capacity emerged as another pressing concern during the interviews. Nearly every agency and organization reported being severely understaffed. This has been markedly intensified following the Dixie Fire. A substantial amount of nonprofit work is completed by volunteers, who are overworked and experiencing burnout, compounded with their own personal trauma and secondary trauma. Many of the volunteers are giving significant time over and above their paying jobs; some are working 40 hours or more a week on recovery; for those that are paid, funding for their positions may be secured for only for a few months. A lack of availability of professional staff and systems is hindering their effectiveness in meeting the overwhelming needs of the community and threatening

TOP POST-FIRE THEMES



Housing

Already a concern pre-fire, the housing market was made significantly worse

01



Capacity

Agencies and organizations are understaffed or experiencing burnout

02



Economic Development

This is intertwined with housing and the need for tax revenue to support services

03



Behavioral & Mental Health

Need for services has increased post fire, and following COVID-19

04

the very viability of the entire Plumas County social safety net.

The following are a few examples that arose during the course of Morrison's interviews that illustrate the extreme lack of staffing:

- Interviews were scheduled directly with the heads of agencies and organizations as they do not have support staff to assist them with basic administrative tasks and functions.
- Heads of agencies and organizations have key missing higher level staff and so are filling 2-4 jobs, each of which is a full-time position.
- Getting people to participate in the interviews was challenging and many expressed having a lack of time and bandwidth even for a 30-45 minute interview.
- It is not uncommon for one person to serve on multiple boards of directors or as the head of multiple organizations.
- Key recovery and rebuilding efforts are being executed out of small back rooms without sufficient computers, internet access, or needed financial and/or tracking systems.



Photo by Tim Mossholder on Unsplash

For many of these agencies and organizations, to significantly increase capacity it would be sufficient to fill one to four key positions; for the larger agencies and organizations it would require filling more key positions. Housing was cited as a significant issue in hiring staff and being able to recruit qualified staff from other areas for key positions.

A number of agencies and organizations reported being

underfunded as well, particularly in terms of being able to offer competitive wages to attract qualified personnel to positions. There often seemed to be funding for positions, but not adequate salaries/wages to attract skilled and experienced personnel to these open positions. Additionally, many organizations, particularly the smaller organizations interviewed, seemed to need to bolster their financial understanding and sophistication; some lacked a solid grasp on their current budget positions and/or need internal controls and structure to be able to effectively manage large sums of funding.

Another aspect of capacity that was frequently mentioned, and discussed in the Government section, is the perception that the Plumas County government has been very reluctant to pursue funding to provide any additional services beyond what they are required to provide. This includes grant funding that would increase the capacity of social safety net agencies and organizations. There has not been an investment made in personnel to provide grant writing or grant administration services which is also perceived as crippling the capacity of the social safety net.

There has been a significant gap in Disaster Case Management services while Plumas County was waiting for government funding to come through. In the meantime, the Alliance for Workforce Development provided funding for two Disaster Case Managers (DCM) under Plumas Rural Services (PRS) and other volunteers have been assisting survivors in navigating the various services systems on a more ad hoc basis. Government funding for DCMs is just now coming through and it will be important to evaluate whether there are a sufficient number of DCMs to assist survivors.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development emerged as a significant theme through the interviews. While there seemed to be an awareness of the complexity of economic development for a very rural county with a small population, it was often coupled with a sense of opportunity for and a need to capitalize on this moment to shift the economic development trajectory. Economic development is also seen as intertwined with addressing the housing crisis and the need for tax revenue to support services.

The need for a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Plumas County was stressed during interviews. This is seen as a significant gap that could be remedied if there is enough political will at the County

leadership level to develop a plan. In the absence of the perceived lack of political will, the Sierra Small Business Council is convening meetings about economic development and seeking to educate the public on Economic Development Districts and CEDS to try to help move Plumas County forward in this area. Many stakeholders noted that the lack of a CEDS at the county level will hinder the ability to access certain federal and state funds. The need for an Economic Development Director for Plumas County was also discussed. Additionally, there is a perception that the Chambers of Commerce in Plumas County have historically operated in siloes; there seems to be movement toward more collaboration, but the lack of collaboration was an expressed concern.

For Greenville, there is a sense of urgency to bring back and attract/bring in new key businesses that will reinvigorate the downtown area and also draw people back to Greenville post-fire. There is progress in Greenville creating a temporary business area with temporary units for businesses while they wait to rebuild.

Much of the housing market for employees was destroyed by the Dixie Fire, part of the workforce is still displaced from fire, and much of the workforce cannot afford the housing market in Plumas County. There is a perception that there are a lot of jobs in Plumas County, but that there is a great difficulty in finding employees. Housing was cited as a significant issue in hiring employees and being able to recruit qualified employees. Businesses need employees and employees need housing to be able to work in Plumas County. Additionally, there is a prevalent perception that there is a growing dependency on government money from a certain segment of the workforce. It was mentioned that stakeholders believed people can make more money from government assistance than they would at a minimum wage job, driving a lack of incentive for them to seek work.

The need for high speed internet for businesses, the need for high speed internet to attract remote workers, and the barrier of internet connectivity for businesses was mentioned with frequency during the course of the interviews.

A need for business training and workforce training that is empowering to the locals was also mentioned as well as a sense that businesses and/or individuals do not necessarily know what resources are available to them for training. Stakeholders also expressed the desire for training in trauma for businesses to be able to care for their staff who have experienced trauma and/or secondary trauma and to know how to provide customer service to customers who

are experiencing trauma.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Most stakeholders ranked behavioral health services as a high concern, although generally not as high of a concern as housing. Many of those interviewed noted that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for these services pre-fire and then the Dixie Fire exacerbated the need even more. There were a small number of stakeholders that ranked it as a very low concern often believing while there could be an increase in services available there are services in place for those who really need them.

There was definitely a mix of perception about the quality of these services in Plumas County. Some stakeholders perceive the services to be reasonably adequate, but limited; some perceive them to have improved; and some perceive them to be very poor and massively lacking.

There were a number of significant gaps in behavioral health and mental health services identified by stakeholders namely:

- Services are headquartered in Quincy with limited services in other parts of Plumas County which makes accessing these services very challenging for a large segment of the population. The four Wellness Centers (located in Greenville, Portola, Chester, and Quincy), although open very limited days and hours, have seen a significant increase in people accessing services. Each Wellness Center provides a range of activities and services, as requested by the community where it is located (e.g., yoga, drug and alcohol treatment, behavioral health therapy, food pantry, showers, video library, computer library, etc.)
- There are no psychiatrists in the whole County. Telepsychiatry is being provided which is helping to address this significant gap; but is not seen as sufficient to address the need.
- There are only a few mental health counselors in all of Plumas County.
- There can be long waiting lists to see providers.
- Many of these services are only available for lower-income populations and those that qualify for government assistance programs. This makes access to behavioral health and mental health resources financially challenging and prohibitive for many in the middle class.
- There is a need for mild to moderate behavioral health and mental health providers. It is challenging to access services if someone is not suffering from severe mental illness.

- While people can sign up for various government assistance programs online, however, for those without internet access or who are not internet savvy it can be challenging to access the services.
- Many stated the need for mental health services to help the community process the effects of disaster.

While drug use and addiction issues were mentioned, it was not a major topic that stakeholders discussed.

TRAUMA

Closely related to behavioral health and mental health, the theme of trauma and the need for trauma education and trauma-informed care for all sectors of Plumas County and segments of the population surfaced throughout the interviews. The need for survivors, first responders, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses, children, the elderly, etc. to understand trauma including secondary trauma surfaced as a theme over and over again. There was also an emphasis on not underestimating the impact of trauma on people's ability to navigate the various systems (FEMA, social services, rebuilding homes, businesses, etc.) that they might normally have been able to navigate.

The trauma of losing historical landmarks in Greenville and the significant damage to culturally significant lands in Indian Valley creates a more complex approach to recovery and services and needs around this.

UNMET NEEDS

Multiple nonprofits, government agencies (including law enforcement), businesses, philanthropy organizations, and churches have stepped in to try to meet the vast unmet needs during and in the wake of the fire. At this point in the recovery process, unmet needs are still seen as a significant issue to address. Stakeholders, including the Native community, expressed the importance of funding unmet needs and funding personnel to continue to address the unmet needs of fire survivors. Unmet needs discussed included: clothing, gas cards, utility bills, food, among others.

GOVERNMENT

Many stakeholders expressed significant frustration with Plumas County government and with FEMA. Some stakeholders expressed that they saw Plumas County government and those with FEMA as trying their best and their personnel as dedicated, but that the nature of

government bureaucracy prevents them from effectively providing assistance. Several perceive that the Board of Supervisors has historically been reluctant to accept federal and state monies beyond what they are required to do which has crippled Plumas County's response to the disaster in many ways, including in limited services, a lack of personnel, a lack of 211, a lack of an economic development district, a lack of investing in personnel to pursue grant funding and to administer grant funding. The lack of investment is seen to have severely inhibited the County in being able to quickly access resources for recovery and/or administer resources for recovery. There was frustration expressed in: the lack of leadership in the recovery effort, the lack of leadership in a strategic plan for the recovery, the lack of leadership in economic development, the slowness of government, the perceived lack of communication which has compounded the lack of trust, and a lack of responsiveness. Additionally, stakeholders noted the lack of coordinated/joint leadership between federal, state, and county governments which has further contributed to the frustration and often to confusion.

Morrison also observed that there is a lack of capacity that likely contributes to the lack of responsiveness and the frustration. An example of this lack of capacity shared by a stakeholder is that Plumas County was allotted almost \$700,000 under the 2020 CARES Act. However, by early 2021, Plumas County had not even applied for its allotment due to "capacity issues." The stakeholder shared that as of the writing of this report, none of the money has been spent. This is unfortunate because the CARES Act guidelines allowed for grants to businesses and non-profits which could have helped businesses in 2021 when the Dixie Fire tore through Plumas County. Another example of the lack of capacity is that there is currently no Chief Administrative Officer for Plumas County which is an absolutely critical position in County leadership.

There are many critical job openings at government agencies, including agencies that directly provide social services, and the low salaries for these positions compounded by the lack of available housing all contribute to the difficulty in finding qualified candidates to fill these key positions.

When discussing FEMA, it was noted multiple times that government programs and administration of those programs do not necessarily fit the rural context. They might be well equipped to provide disaster response in cases of hurricanes or tornadoes or floods, but not for wildfires and not for rural areas. It was also noted that FEMA took an extended period of time to involve the local tribes in the process which was seen as a major miss in the early

recovery effort. One stakeholder conveyed that survivors are often discouraged in the FEMA paperwork process as it is not uncommon for paperwork to get rejected multiple times and it is really hard for survivors to navigate the paperwork due to trauma.

Multiple stakeholders did express a great appreciation for the work of Supervisor Kevin Goss in the recovery effort and for CalOES, seeing them as effective partners and advocates towards recovery and rebuilding.

TRIBAL MEMBERS

Tribal stakeholders interviewed expressed concern about the tribal community being shattered and overwhelmed by where to start with so much loss and trauma. The trauma of losing historical landmarks in Greenville and the significant damage to culturally significant lands in Indian Valley creates a more complex approach to recovery and services and needs around this. There is a deep sense of the loss of community with so much of their land being destroyed by the fire and then people leaving the area in its wake. A need for emotional and spiritual support as well as a need for community events to help rebuild the social network was discussed. There was discussion about the resiliency of the tribal community and the strength of tribal family units and how they take care of one another in the face of such trauma and disaster.

Other themes and topics that emerged during the interviews included:

- Unmet needs are still significant, especially in Greenville among the native population. Clothing, assistance with bills, gas cards, food, continue to be very much needed.
- There is frustration about being left out of important meetings/processes or being invited to the table late in the process.
- The barrier of a lack of transportation/distances required to travel to receive services continues to be significant and the destruction of Greenville only served to exacerbate the barrier.
- One stakeholder noted that it is hard to reach the elderly with behavioral health services, but for the youth it is becoming more the norm. With the impact of the pandemic and then the devastation of the Dixie Fire, the youth and elderly are seen to be particularly vulnerable and struggling.
- As mentioned under Healthcare, the loss of the medical clinics and the pharmacy in Greenville has also significantly impacted tribal members' ability to access needed

healthcare. One stakeholder mentioned it can take weeks to get in to see a doctor and the mental health providers are "pretty booked up" as well.

- It was also noted that some of the tribes are not federally recognized which creates additional challenges in the recovery process and particularly in accessing some government funding.
- There is a gap in organizational capacity among tribal organizations due to a lack of funding.
- There is a desire for the reinvigoration of the Maidu landscape, language, and architecture in the rebuilding.
- The importance of economic development efforts in Greenville was emphasized.
- There is a need for tribal youth to see leaders in their schools and community that are also native.
- There continue to be challenges with drug and alcohol addiction among the community.

There was significant concern expressed by the non-native stakeholders that the tribal community is treated well and included in the recovery and rebuilding process. Non-natives expressed a desire to respect and celebrate the Native American culture in the rebuilding process as well as wanting to understand more about the specific needs and desires for recovery of the tribes in the area. There is a lack of clarity among non-natives about the tribe's specific needs in rebuilding and recovery.

CHILDREN

There was significant concern expressed about the trauma children and youth in Plumas County have experienced with both the COVID-19 pandemic and with the Dixie Fire. There is not a pediatrician in Plumas County which was noted as a significant issue for healthcare for children. It was also shared that it is really hard to get children who are not on Medi-Cal to access behavioral health services. Three other significant themes arose during the interviews which are further explored below.

CHILDCARE

The strong need for childcare and after school care was a key theme that arose through the interviews. There was a shortage of childcare before the fire which has been exacerbated significantly after the fire. Additionally, childcare is seen as key to supporting the workforce. One stakeholder stated that "childcare and after school care are desperately needed." Another stakeholder stated that only 60 percent of zero to five year olds are able to get into preschool.

SCHOOLS IN PLUMAS COUNTY

Although the response was mixed, stakeholders generally expressed a sense that Plumas County schools educate children well. There were some that indicated there is a lot of dissatisfaction with the schools in Plumas County too. Those involved with the schools noted they are seeing more time spent in managing behaviors than in teaching (which was also true pre-fire).

Greenville students are having to commute to other areas in Plumas County, significant distances away from Greenville, to attend school which has been really difficult for the students and their families and has also impacted the workforce. Students will return to Greenville for school in the fall, but in the meantime, the commute is very wearying to the students and their families.

There is a concern about school staffing levels which started with the COVID-19 pandemic and continues post-fire. School closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic took out some of the workforce, and then post-fire some teachers and staff have left because they could not find housing and because of the trauma they experienced of continuing to live in the fire area. Additionally, there is a significant number of staff that are going to retire that will need to be replaced. Moreover, according to one stakeholder it is one of the lowest paid school districts in the state which makes attracting qualified teachers and staff challenging.

The school district does have the budget to have a licensed therapist on all the school campuses in the district. However, they are having a hard time hiring for those positions because of a lack of qualified people applying for the positions. There seems to be a good relationship between the schools and Plumas County Behavioral Health; they will be implementing telehealth infrastructure through funding received from Plumas County Behavioral Health in all the schools which is seen as a valuable asset, although not the same as having someone in person for students to talk with. The district is well equipped with school nurses and it was noted that for many of the children in Plumas County, seeing the school nurse might be the only medical professional they see that year.

There were several references to the dynamic/division between the district schools and the charter schools and while most expressed that the division has gotten better over the years, there are still some hard feelings.

Another significant concern one stakeholder expressed is that as of the interview, the state is not going to allow the



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school district to be held harmless financially for the drop in student attendance. This would result in a significant reduction of funding for Plumas County should the state of California not change course on its decision.

ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The lack of activities and the need for activities for children and youth was expressed multiple times by stakeholders as a concern. One stakeholder noted that some organizations that provided activities have been stretched too thin or stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic or because of the fire. It was noted that Quincy has more resources for children; other communities do not have the same level of resources/activities.

ELDERLY SERVICES

Stakeholders expressed great concern about the elderly's ability to access services. It was noted there are some good senior meal programs, and also Senior Connections and Senior Life Solutions (an intensive outpatient group therapy program for 65 years old and older) run by the Plumas District Hospital which are great resources for the elderly. However, it was noted that Senior Life Solutions is already at maximum capacity. Significant issues or gaps discussed include:

- Communication issues – letting the elderly know about the services that are available and where to access them is challenging. A lot of communication about the availability of services is accomplished through social media which many elderly people may not have access to and/or may not have internet connectivity or understand fully how to engage through these platforms. With no printed newspaper in Plumas County, it is challenging to convey information to the elderly.
- Lack of caregivers – A lack of caregivers was also cited as a gap in the social safety net for the elderly.

- There are no services for those suffering from dementia; they have to travel outside Plumas County for residential care.
- Transportation – Transportation was seen as a barrier to the elderly accessing services, including being able to fill their prescriptions. As noted previously, the pharmacy in Greenville burned down so the elderly who live in that area have to travel an even greater distance to fill their prescriptions. Winter conditions can prevent the elderly from leaving their houses, and if they do, the road conditions to access services can be treacherous.
- Isolation – There is concern about the isolation that seniors in Plumas County have experienced first with the COVID-19 pandemic and now because of the fire.
- Veterans services – It was noted that there are some services for elderly veterans.
- It was said that getting people in the elderly age range to seek services can often be challenging.

HEALTHCARE

The perspectives on the quality of healthcare and healthcare access was mixed among the stakeholders. There was a general sense that the medical service issues in Plumas County are following the rural pattern. Some perceive healthcare access as good for rural, but definitely missing specialty healthcare in Plumas County; others perceive the healthcare access as significantly lacking. Of note, there is no pediatrician and no psychiatrist in Plumas County. The perception of the lack of access often had to do with the limited days in which healthcare is available in certain communities as well as due to the lack of providers. As is the case with other sectors, the lower salaries for these positions (compared to other areas) compounded by a lack of housing availability is seen to contribute to the difficulty in finding more qualified medical professionals. Stakeholders noted that those with financial resources often go outside of Plumas County to get care and to receive most specialty care services people have to travel outside Plumas County.

Significant gaps and challenges stakeholders mentioned include:

- Transportation significantly impedes healthcare access, especially preventative healthcare access and especially for lower-income populations and the elderly.
- There is a certain segment of the population that will not access preventative care; it is difficult to know how to encourage them/educate them about the importance of preventative care. They will access emergency services, but not preventative care.
- There are not enough providers. There is a need to

recruit more and younger providers, especially as some providers are seeking to retire soon. The housing shortage plays into this issue as well.

- It is difficult to recruit for and maintain paramedics and other emergency services positions.
- There is no pharmacy in Greenville because it burned down; this is a significant issue for Greenville residents, especially the elderly or lower income residents, because they have to travel to Quincy or Chester for prescriptions.
- If someone needs to see a specialist they might not get timely care, because the specialists that do come to Plumas County are only there on a very limited schedule. To receive most specialty care services, people must travel outside Plumas County.
- There is not sufficient dental or eye care in Plumas County.
- The closure of the hospital in Greenville over a decade ago continues to impact the community.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and the Dixie Fire exposed the gaps in the hospital facilities; as required by the State the hospital facilities will need to be replaced by 2030.



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TRANSPORTATION

Transportation was identified over and over again as a significant barrier to Plumas County residents accessing needed services; stakeholders noted this is especially true of the lower-income, elderly, overlooked, and underserved populations. Transportation was discussed as a significant barrier among the Native community as well. The vastness of Plumas County with long distances between population centers, treacherous roads in the winter, incredibly high gas prices combined with a lower-income population which often does not have reliable vehicles, is seen to significantly prevent access to needed services including behavioral health services, mental health services, healthcare, and preventative care. Government services are headquartered in Quincy which is a

long distance from the other population centers in Plumas County; transportation to Quincy from these other areas is seen as a huge barrier to accessing services.

COMMUNICATION

Though the efforts of the Funders Roundtable and Dixie Fire Collaborative were applauded by most interviewed, the majority of those interviewed noted a continued communication gap and gap in collaboration between agencies, organizations and with the community. For example, there is no one site or location where a list of all the services offered to those impacted by the fire is available. This is exacerbated by distance, lack of a printed newspaper, internet connectivity, lack of internet savvy, and reliable cell phone coverage. Meetings are hard to attend for those providing services and people often have to travel long distances to be able to attend meetings.

HIGH SPEED INTERNET

The need for high speed internet was continually expressed. Although the U.S. Census Bureau data indicates that 77.9 percent of the population in Plumas County has a broadband internet subscription; those interviewed indicated that internet access for most is very slow, often irregular, or out-of-service. It is seen as critical for facilitating better communication, for economic development, for attracting businesses, and for attracting remote workers to the area.

Concern about Overlooked Populations: Stakeholders identified the following groups in Plumas County that they are concerned might be overlooked or underserved in the recovery and rebuilding process:

- Tribal members
- Children and youth
- Elderly
- Uninsured or underinsured homeowners and renters
- Middle class
- Veterans
- Those living at poverty line
- Mentally ill

FAITH COMMUNITY

Many stakeholders noted that the faith community in Plumas County has responded well to a significant amount of immediate needs. There is a sense that their efforts are relatively siloed and there is not much collaboration between churches or faith groups. The DFC is working on developing an interfaith council to increase collaboration and coordination of efforts. It was noted by some that churches are important community gathering spots, especially in a rural community and that they are pretty embedded in the community.

HOMELESSNESS

Stakeholders expressed concern as it relates to fire survivors who lost homes, but otherwise generally see homelessness as a smaller issue in Plumas County. Very few stakeholders mentioned homelessness as a significant problem for Plumas County. Some noted that homelessness is a different issue in the rural context than in the urban context, usually meaning they are often out of sight and living in the mountains.

OTHER CONCERNS

There were a significant number of stakeholders who expressed that they see a lack of collaboration among service providers and even some territorialism in certain instances. However, there also seems to be a sense among many that the fire has helped catalyze more collaboration among many service providers and that collaboration among the service providers will be foundational to shoring up the social safety net in Plumas County. A few other concerns that were expressed include: the impact of drug addiction in Plumas County, the prevalence of blight, the need for more law enforcement, a need to engage the second home owners in philanthropy and the larger issues Plumas County is facing.

V. Recommendations

- Based on the research above, recommendations begin with the top safety net issues identified – Housing, Capacity Building, Economic Development, and Behavioral and Mental Health – followed by recommendations for strengthening the social safety net by the other themes identified through the stakeholder interviews.



Frost falls on a burn scar in Plumas County. Photo ©Dana Mite, totalescapes.com

Some of these efforts may already be developing or may evolve as new needs emerge and other resources are available to the area. The recommendations are for philanthropy, government, and other stakeholders to consider as it is going to require all sectors to work together to strengthen the fragile social safety net in Plumas County. The recommendations are meant as starting places for additional consideration, but will require further research and due diligence prior to investment.

As previously discussed, the issues of housing and capacity building are seen as inextricably intertwined in the recovery and rebuilding process. Although some may not usually see economic development as critical in strengthening the social safety net after disasters, in the rural context of Plumas County, it is perceived by many as foundational to buoy the social safety net.

Recommendations – Housing



- Complete housing study (Greenville Wildfire Recovery Planning Process: Phase 0, Discovery): The DFC and the Funders Round Table moved with impressive speed to conduct a housing survey and commission a housing study. The completion of the housing study is critical to better understand the housing needs, the desires, the mix of rental and ownership, affordability levels, and locations. Understanding the culture, needs, and desires of a more rural population will be central to the success of any housing project. The costs of homeowners insurance and rental insurance should also be incorporated into the study as it will impact the true cost of housing in Plumas County.
- Have County staff review planning and zoning regulations and ways they might help or hinder construction of new housing.
- Streamline permitting processes as much as possible (this is underway), and explore funding to assist with permitting costs and impact fees.
- Explore implementing a comprehensive land survey to flag property corners/lines and reduce cost burden on landowners to rebuild. One issue that arose during the interviews was that in this rural county with landowners often owning large parcels of land, many property lines are not clearly defined, and a survey of the land has to be done prior to buying or selling a property. Covering the costs of a land survey may be a way to reduce costs to those who want to buy, sell, and/or rebuild.
- The housing study should be conducted in conjunction with a county economic development study and/or regional economic development plan with a specific economic development plan for rebuilding Greenville. Without the context of a larger economic development plan, it is possible various housing scenarios could be unfeasible without the economy to support housing and rental costs.
- Research workforce training programs and partnerships that could be utilized to assist with the rebuilding of Greenville as a workforce development opportunity. This could be an avenue to train and empower the population and increase the workforce. There may be opportunities for high school students and Feather River College students to be exposed to careers in the construction trades, participate in apprenticeship programs, as well as develop other career pathways. Potential partnerships with labor organizations might include the Contractors Exchange and the Carpenters Training Committee for Northern California.
- Conduct a grant search of federal and state government funding opportunities for housing including from: the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the United States Department of Agriculture, and California state funding programs, among others. The capacity to conduct a grant search, write grants, and administer grants is addressed under Capacity.
- Explore potential partnerships with regional housing developers and organizations to increase the local production capacity.
- Identify a point person/agency within Plumas County leadership to act as a funnel for all housing-related information and for people to know who they could approach to ask housing-related questions.

Recommendations – Capacity Building

■ The need for additional personnel and to train personnel to increase capacity was found across all the sectors interviewed. As noted under Post-Fire Themes: Capacity, a lack of availability of professional staff and systems is hindering their effectiveness in meeting the overwhelming needs of the community and threatening the very viability of the entire Plumas County social safety net. In order to build the needed capacity to strengthen the social safety net in recovery and rebuilding after the Dixie Fire, it is critical to invest in additional personnel and in training for personnel. For many agencies and organizations, adding one to four staff members would considerably increase capacity. Although funders often do not find paying for staff very appealing, the need for staffing and for training to shore up the social safety net in Plumas County cannot be overstated. The ability to attract qualified personnel for open positions is also intertwined with housing availability. Recommendations include:



Adobe Stock

- With the housing availability so low, it is extremely difficult for agencies and organizations to recruit and hire for key positions. Until more housing is built, if philanthropy and other investments could support outside contractors that could be shared among organizations, it has potential to move the needle on the staffing issues. Agencies and organizations could explore shared virtual assistants, bookkeepers, marketing and communication coordinators, recruiters, among other options for shared positions. These models exist for different sectors and could be a worthy model to explore to increase the capacity while waiting for the housing stock to be rebuilt.
- The Almanor Foundation is poised to serve as a valuable resource to assist nonprofits with increasing their capacity through their roles of sharing community information, aligning social action, deploying financial capital, building community capacity (including helping nonprofits with organizational effectiveness), incubating social enterprises and businesses, among other roles they play. Particularly, if The Almanor Foundation could serve as a hub of both financial services/expertise and as a hub of training for nonprofits (and potentially other sectors) they could be an important catalyst in the region to build nonprofit capacity. As a philanthropic effort that represents all of Plumas County, leveraging their expertise to effectively build the capacity of the social safety net will be critical.
- As a rural county with a small population, it is critical to invest in fundraising efforts and seeking grant money. A leveraged way to do this for funders may be to support the hiring of grant writing personnel (for both government agencies and for nonprofits) to seek monies available for the agencies and nonprofits and to be able to administer any grants received.
- In order to seek additional grant funding at a county level, Plumas County agencies need the support and buy-in of the Board of Supervisors, including approving the needed additional personnel to support raising additional funds.

Recommendations – Economic Development

■ As stated previously, housing and increasing capacity of the social safety net are intimately intertwined with economic development in the context of Plumas County. Recommendations include:



- Commission an economic development study. An economic development plan to rebuild Greenville could be part of this study or commissioned as a separate study. Important aspects of economic development to consider would be among others: the economic feasibility of businesses post-fire; an analysis of options to incentivize businesses to come to Plumas County; case studies on rural towns that have seen successful economic development to better understand their keys to success and what might work for Greenville and other towns in Plumas County.
- Work with Plumas County to advocate for/develop a comprehensive economic development strategy for the County. This was cited as a significant gap in the economic development of Plumas County and frustration both pre- and post-fire. There is a perceived history of towns battling for resources against each other rather than being part of a larger strategy. It would also be important to work with leadership within Plumas County to form a formal economic development agency.
- The County should explore hiring an Economic Development Director. This position could have a strong return on investment by leveraging them to write grants and to help guide economic development throughout Plumas County (and could likely pay for their salary and benefits through grant awards).
- Work to get basic stores and services back to Greenville quickly (hardware store, pharmacy, restaurants, hair salon, etc.). The gas station reopening and the operating grocery store is a huge step in this process. There was positive feedback and discussion about the momentum to have pop-up businesses in Greenville in temporary units to help get people back downtown and provide a sense of community.
- Work with the state on options for maintaining tax revenue while rebuilding the tax base.
- Identify business training, mentorship, counseling, and business loan options and partner with the Chambers of Commerce to promote the opportunities.
- Leverage the Chambers of Commerce to move the needle on economic development. They could advocate for the needed changes at the county level (some Chambers are already doing this); promote various economic development efforts, like the Pop-Up Greenville Business District; promote the social safety net services through their mailing lists; and contribute to economic development efforts, among other possibilities.
- Continue to invest in job training and workforce development in key economic sectors.
- Invest in supporting tourism which is a staple industry in Plumas County.
- Conduct trauma-informed training for business owners; relevant for both employees and customers.

Recommendations – Behavioral Health and Mental Health Services

- The need for increased behavioral health and mental health services for the general population was a clear theme through the stakeholder interviews. Morrison’s observation is that in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Dixie Fire, there is a strong need to bolster behavioral health and mental health services; although there can still be hesitancy to access them, people are more open to seeking services and the impact/trauma of the pandemic and the fire is deeply felt by those living in Plumas County. Recommendations to address this need include:



Photo by Ashkan Forouzan on Unsplash

- With the housing availability so low, it is extremely difficult for agencies and organizations to recruit and hire for key positions. Until more housing is built, if philanthropy and other investments could support outside contractors that could be shared among organizations, it has potential to move the needle on the staffing issues. Agencies and organizations could explore shared virtual assistants, bookkeepers, marketing and communication coordinators, recruiters, among other options for shared positions. These models exist for different sectors and could be a worthy model to explore to increase the capacity while waiting for the housing stock to be rebuilt.
- The Almanor Foundation is poised to serve as a valuable resource to assist nonprofits with increasing their capacity through their roles of sharing community information, aligning social action, deploying financial capital, building community capacity (including helping nonprofits with organizational effectiveness), incubating social enterprises and businesses, among other roles they play. Particularly, if The Almanor Foundation could serve as a hub of both financial services/expertise and as a hub of training for nonprofits (and potentially other sectors) they could be an important catalyst in the region to build nonprofit capacity. As a philanthropic effort that represents all of Plumas County, leveraging their expertise to effectively build the capacity of the social safety net will be critical.
- As a rural county with a small population, it is critical to invest in fundraising efforts and seeking grant money. A leveraged way to do this for funders may be to support the hiring of grant writing personnel (for both government agencies and for nonprofits) to seek monies available for the agencies and nonprofits and to be able to administer any grants received.
- In order to seek additional grant funding at a county level, Plumas County agencies need the support and buy-in of the Board of Supervisors, including approving the needed additional personnel to support raising additional funds.

Recommendations – Childcare, Schools, Kids & Youth

- The need for childcare and after school care was a prominent theme that arose during the interviews. This was a surprisingly consistent topic expressed by stakeholders. Recommendations to address this need include:



- Conduct a childcare and after school care needs assessment to determine the current providers in each community, the number of providers needed to address the lack of childcare and afterschool care, assess personnel needs and costs to implement more robust childcare and after school care programs.
- Heavily promote vacant school staff positions and positions that will be vacated due to upcoming retirements. Examine ways to increase salaries to be able to attract more and more qualified teachers and staff.
- If it is determined that schools will not be held harmless financially, it will be important to advocate that they be held harmless financially. There would be significant negative funding consequences if the state refuses to do so in the wake of the Dixie Fire.
- Invest in and support organizations that are offering recreational activities for kids and youth. This could include exploring the feasibility of youth centers in various communities.
- Seek to educate families about trauma and trauma-informed care for the children.
- Continue to utilize school teachers and staff to help promote and build trust for safety net services.
- Explore introducing high school students to career pathways, like construction, that will be prevalent through the rebuilding process.
- The utilization of school counselors and the addition of telehealth infrastructure is a significant asset to the Plumas County schools.

Recommendations – Elderly

- In addition to children, the elderly were cited frequently as an at-risk population that might be overlooked in the rebuilding process. There was also concern about the isolation that both the COVID-19 pandemic and the fire has had on the elderly. The building of a skilled nursing facility is in progress which is very much needed in Plumas County. Recommendations for strengthening the social safety net for the elderly include:



- Create volunteer coalitions to reach out to the elderly. This could help both with assisting with their immediate needs as well as a sense of connection and community.
- Improve communication of services to elderly. It was noted multiple times that it is hard to reach the elderly and let them know about the availability of services.
- Host gatherings for the elderly to help reestablish the sense of community and connection.
- Explore the possibility of a senior center or day facility for seniors to bolster their access to resources and reduce isolation.
- Re-opening the pharmacy in Greenville will be important for the elderly to be able to have better access to their prescriptions.



Photo by CDC on Unsplash

- Promote the need for more caregivers for the elderly to allow them to stay in their home. Additionally, explore ways to provide financial support for those who need in-home assistance, but do not qualify for in-home support from the government; it was noted that many seniors are right on the edge of qualifying and for those that do not qualify it is not often financially viable for them to be able to pay out of pocket for services.
- Provide financial trainings for the elderly to help them know how to navigate their finances.

Recommendations – Tribal Members

- In addition to children and the elderly, tribal members were cited frequently as an at-risk population that might be overlooked in the rebuilding process. Recommendations include to:



Photo by Toni Scott

- Proactively reach out to and pursue their involvement in the recovery process. This might be accomplished through requesting to attend board meetings or other tribal meetings. Tribal members are also often hesitant to seek help; when they do it will be critical to ensure they are treated with the utmost respect.
- Support community events to help tribal members re-establish and re-invigorate the Maidu culture, language, and architecture to help undergird the fabric of community in the wake of such devastating loss. Additionally, supporting efforts to reach out to tribal youth and the elderly to connect them to the larger community will be essential.
- Explore helping tribal organizations build capacity. Similar to the recommendation under Building Capacity, if philanthropy and other investments could support personnel and/or outside contractors that could be shared among organizations, it has potential to move the needle on the staffing issues. Tribal agencies and organizations could explore shared virtual assistants, bookkeepers, marketing and communication coordinators, among other options for shared positions. These models exist for different sectors and could be a worthy model to explore to increase the capacity while waiting for the housing stock to be rebuilt.
- Continue to invest in funding unmet needs of the tribal community; the unmet needs are still extensive and it will be important to continue to meet the needs to support moving forward in recovery and rebuilding.
- Explore whether there might be specific studies that the tribal population would like to see funded to specifically help them with the recovery and rebuilding process.

- The approach to recovery and rebuilding needs to be centered around the tribal members and their leadership; not assuming their needs. Proactively engaging the tribal community with cultural awareness, respect, humility, and care will be absolutely critical in successful collaboration in the recovery and rebuilding process.

Recommendations – Healthcare

■ The identified needs to increase the capacity of the social safety net as it relates to healthcare are largely related to staffing. Identified recommendations include:



- • Explore recruiting more providers / open positions (as there are multiple providers seeking to retire and it will be critical to replace them); a pediatrician; eye care professionals; and dental professionals. The lack of providers in these areas were cited as significant gaps in healthcare in Plumas County. A further analysis needs to be done to confirm the feasibility/sustainability of these positions over the long term to recommend investment. As noted above, the lack of housing availability is a complicating factor.
- • Explore additional telehealth options and mobile healthcare options (mobile dental, mobile doctors, etc.) as a way to increase services in the midst of the housing shortage and in this rural area. While it might take a long time to add additional providers, additional telehealth providers and mobile healthcare options might be one way to help bridge the gap.
- • An additional effort needs to be made to work to get people connected to preventative / primary care, especially children and the elderly.

Recommendations – Disaster Case Management



- Case management will be key to helping the population navigate resources to rebuild their lives following the Dixie Fire. The recommendation is to monitor case management adequacy and ratios and determine whether further investment is needed in additional case management personnel. Additionally, as part of monitoring adequacy it will be critical that disaster case managers are well-trained so they are able to effectively help those seeking to rebuild from the Dixie Fire. Disaster case managers have incredible influence in getting people the services and resources they need and to do so effectively they need to be well-trained.

Recommendations – Transportation

Transportation arose as a large barrier in accessing services in Plumas County. The recommendation includes a search for innovative transportation programs and the funding to provide additional transportation services and resources. The need for transportation arose particularly when discussing the elderly, tribal members, and those with a low-income who might not have a reliable car or be able to afford gas. A transportation program in partnership with Lyft or Uber was mentioned by one stakeholder, this could be further explored.

Recommendations – Communication

Communication infrastructure needs to be improved to educate people on the services available and to let them know where to access them. It is particularly important to invest in finding the best mechanism to communicate with the elderly who were identified as particularly at risk.

Create one website that can house all the resources available and that can be referred to across service providers. Update the website weekly, provide a printable downloadable flyer for service providers across the community to be able to print and post each week, and provide posts/links on social media weekly that can easily be shared by service providers and others across platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) to reach a wide range of the population. Effective “marketing” of the “resource hub” will be key to communicating with the community about the availability of services.

Invest in the effort to establish 211. The success of 211 is important to improving the information infrastructure and to helping people know how and where to access services.

Promote 211. Once 211 is established, it will be important to promote the availability of the resource to at-risk groups including the elderly and families with children.

Recommendations – Unmet Needs

Unmet needs are seen by stakeholders as a significant issue and meeting these needs is seen as essential to help keep people on a road to recovery and rebuilding. It is imperative to continue to fund those working to meet unmet needs at this point in the recovery and to foster collaboration among the various organizations, agencies, churches, etc. to prevent siloes and the duplication of services in order to effectively work together to move people toward case management and ultimately rebuilding their lives.

Recommendations – High Speed Internet

The importance of Plumas County investing in high speed internet as key to the communication infrastructure, economic development, telemedicine, and distance learning (should it be required again) was stated over and over. As of the writing of this report, there is a Broadband Workgroup that is pursuing grant funding for high speed internet with Plumas Sierra Telecommunications a key player in this effort. Supporting this effort should be a high priority for the County and other stakeholders.

Recommendations – Trauma Training

People across Plumas County and across social safety net agencies and organizations could benefit significantly from trauma-informed trainings. While trauma-informed training are occurring, seeking to expand the training across sectors would be important to aid the resilience and recovery of Plumas County post- Dixie Fire. Utilize organizations like Plumas Rural Services, North Valley Community Foundation, and others that have existing trauma-informed trainings to work with government, schools, coaches, businesses, general community members, elderly, tribal population, among other demographics, to provide education on trauma and to assist survivors and others in the community to navigate trauma in a healthier way.



VI. Conclusion

- There is a deep sense of commitment to and investment in Plumas County from the stakeholders interviewed that was truly inspiring. The passion, commitment, and competence of the providers and stakeholders interviewed are strong assets that will serve to strengthen the social safety net in the months and years of recovery and rebuilding ahead. Continued growth in collaboration and intentional efforts to overcome any siloes and territorialism among service providers will be paramount to efforts to strengthen the social safety net in Plumas County. Effective collaboration will minimize duplication of services and competition for the same resources, help better support those in need through the recovery process, and better leverage the resources which are more limited in a small rural county.

The purpose of this social safety net needs assessment is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the social safety net in Plumas County to inform stakeholders and philanthropy efforts. In the actual execution of a strategy, external circumstances, internal decisions, and other factors may dictate departures from the original recommendations. Further, it is not possible to consider every possible cost or circumstance, internal or external. Accordingly, no representation is made as to the outcome of any action or any other party may take based on this Assessment.

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Plumas County Social Safety Net Needs Assessment

